What do you know about us? by ‘Somebody’s Sister’

A note: If you feel like this article is addressing you, then it is. It’s not my problem if you don’t like seeing yourself in the mirror. To those who do know us and stand with us, I send comradely regards.

It’s a question I find myself asking often enough, but it’s been rattling around in my brain with especially violent force in the days since that accursed Supreme Court decision:

What do you know about us?

I ask you sincerely. What do you actually know of or about trans people, trans communities, trans culture? I don’t ask this facetiously. I really want to know- Do you actually, genuinely, know any of us?

And I don’t mean passing acquaintances in your work, neighbourhood, political organisation, etc., nor do I mean the *idea* of trans people you have from some Twitter posts or newspaper articles.

Do you have any trans friends? Trans relatives? Do you talk with them and listen to them? And I don’t mean talking *at* them or pretending to listen. Do you know how we speak, how we joke, how we love, how we grieve? Do you know about our far-reaching networks of friends and polycules, of our dumb in-jokes, our vernaculars, our tastes in fashion, our traditions of knowledge-sharing and mutual aid, our often-shrouded history of defiant existence and struggle?

Our history and community brims with wonderful writers, musicians, comedians, game developers, scientists, filmmakers, artisans, actors, programmers, activists, artists- Do you even know a single one of their names?

When the Supreme Court judgement went out, did you speak with any of us and hear our sorrow and disappointment, our fear for the future?

I ask because the news doesn't show this. At best, they have on a couple people from a charity or the Green Party, if you're lucky an actual trans person, to offer a quick snippet or quote, and then it's back to the gender-criticals, the ideologues and the cynical politicians. We are mostly just discussed, never truly spoken with.

And it shows! The discourse about us is conducted in terms of grotesque stereotypes and ridiculous "what-if" situations. I've seen the idea of us that gender-critical slopheads in Twitter threads and newspaper columns hold to, an absurd caricature that would be hilarious if it wasn't influencing policy and assisting the rise of the far right. The trans people that exist in their heads are creepy, slovenly, asocial and predatory- essentially, inhuman creatures beyond empathy. And yet, it's these imaginary, stereotypical trans people, imaginary trans women specifically, that all the "legitimate concerns" are premised on.

Legitimate concerns. Let's linger on that term for a moment. I can think about some other "legitimate concerns":

The "legitimate concerns" of parents about homosexuals "influencing" their children.

The "legitimate concerns" of Israeli settlers about the "dangers" posed by dispossessed Palestinians.

The "legitimate concerns" of racists all over Europe about Syrian, Afghan, Eritrean, Sudanese, Kurdish and other refugees constituting a force of "fighting-age men" ready to undermine their host country.

And do you remember Emmett Till?

The road to his brutal murder, and the lynching of countless others, was paved with the “legitimate concerns” of white people about “threatening”, “lustful” black people, “concerns” that were just the outward justifications for stereotypes, bigotry, and hatred.

It’s all stereotypes, it’s all horseshit! It’s always horseshit! And you know it. We have seen it all before, past and present, as one group of bigots fearmongers about another marginalised group, and it’s no different with trans people. You might hide behind your “legitimate concerns”, but the truth is that you have more in common with the lynch mob and the settler on the West Bank than any real fighter for human justice.

The trans community as it genuinely exists does not deserve to be demonised like this, just as the concrete, genuine human beings underneath abstractions and umbrella terms like “refugee” or “homosexual” do not deserve to be the victims of prejudice as they try to live decent, dignified lives. Neither me nor the man from Syria should have to answer for *your* ignorance. We just want to live our lives without someone else’s boot on our necks.

Lets face it, whatever legal finery and rhetorical flourishes this offensive against trans people is being draped in, it stems at its core from simple, brutish feelings of disgust. Our enemies are disgusted by us. Or, to put it another way, they pretend that their disgust for us can be hidden by some concocted political or moral ideal. Women with penises give them the ick, and it really does just boil down to that. Never mind that many of us want rid of our dicks at the earliest convenience, and many of us already have vaginas.

Not that genitals are necessarily the ultimate definers of my or any trans woman’s womanhood, by the way. Are your genitals the be-all-and-end-all of your womanhood? Or does some man think so? Excuse me- Hasn’t the feminist movement been

fighting for centuries to destroy a patriarchal tyranny upheld by biological essentialism? And anyhow: *My* genitals are only of significance to me and my partners- The rest of you can fuck off and stop being so bloody nosey!

And yet *we* have to face the consequences for everyone else's creepy obsession with our genitals- And the transphobes call *us* perverts? The nerve!

On the subject of patriarchal domination, let me take this opportunity to point out my own speck of blood on the banner. I've been assaulted by a man on public transport, and I've been sexually assaulted by a man on the street. Do I have to certify my suffering, my oppression by the patriarchy to you, to gain some kind of solidarity and sisterhood?

Let's stop bullshitting. If a man wants to rape a woman, he doesn't go to the ridiculous contrivance of transitioning to be a woman first- What kind of cartoony secret-disguise nonsense do you think rapists operate by? A rapist breaks whatever boundaries he wants- If he wants to force his way into a women's toilet and sexually assault women, he'll try it. If you bothered to know any of us, you'd know that trans women are victims of this too. We are also assaulted, raped and murdered by men, whether in public or in private. The patriarchy aims to control, exploit and mutilate *all* women, cis or trans.

And yet, you consider me and my trans siblings the threat to women's safety, the obstacle to feminist gains? Fuck off and get a grip. Have a good think and realise who your real enemy is. Trust me, he wants me dead too.

The answer to rape culture and patriarchy is not the toilet gestapo. The answer is a united feminist movement that protects and uplifts all targets of the patriarchy, no matter whether they are cis or trans. Feminist comrades in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil understand this far better than us, and

it’s no surprise that their feminist movements are bold, powerful and truly inclusive, while ours here is tiny, weak and demoralised.

I’m tired and hurt, and the quiet burning rage I feel at the collapse I’m seeing around me is so palpable, and has made my hands shake with such fury, that it has been hard to set my thoughts out in greater detail or length. I am going to end here for now, but first:

I must say specifically, to all the useful idiots, fairweather friends, grifters, cynics, opportunists and cowards of the left who skipped out on trans liberation, ignored our struggle, or bought into the culture war offensive against us: I despise you, and if you even bother to read and digest the thoughts of a single trans person about the destruction you’ve assisted by ignorant omission or conscious activity, then I hope you feel sick to your gut with shame for the rest of your life. I hope the guilt chases you forever. You are serving as the “left” wing of a movement for segregation and social murder and I will never consider you a comrade of mine. Ever.

I don’t care how you feel about what I’ve just said. I care about the trans people who will be harassed, beaten, sexually assaulted and killed in public places, who will face discrimination in workplaces, who will feel like they need to go back into the closet to live. Many trans people, despairing of everything, will take their lives in the years to come, and we both know this- don’t you dare be a shitebag and deny it. It is a deeply horrible thing to acknowledge that there are sisters of mine, dear cherished friends, who may not live to see all of this bullshit repealed and sorted. We trans people will do our best to help each other get through this and avoid as much of that as possible. It’s going to be a long and painful road, but we will endure it, just as we always do, no matter the circumstances. Do not forget- Once, many decades ago, using bonfires, camps and mass graves, Hitler’s men tried to wipe us from the face of the Earth.

And yet, they failed. Trans people will never disappear.

But will the bulk of the left be much help to us in defeating this next round of repression and social murder? After witnessing the way the last few years have played out, I can only laugh at that notion. And the laughter is hollow and bitter.

You have failed not just trans people, but all of us. And when the far right goes after abortion or gay rights next, I honestly doubt you'll understand the connection between all of these assaults on civil rights, and the role the anti-trans offensive has played in galvanising them all.

After all, what the fuck do you know about us?

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International Women's Day – "Women's Rights, Human Rights"

Editorial for International Women's Day from USA magazine Against the Current, journal of Solidarity US, "a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization"

Women's Rights, Human Rights

Afghanistan, Iran, Poland, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Texas, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi…

These are among the countries and states where ruling authorities take it upon themselves – in a variety of ways along a broad repressive spectrum – to curtail, suppress or outright nullify women's rights if not their basic personhood. The ways and means of these attacks of course vary widely.

They range from legal and official discrimination, to gendered violence perpetrated with impunity, to rape as a weapon as in Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Ethiopian state's war in Tigray, and more. What's common to each and every case is that degrading women's rights – along with those of queer and non-binary people – is central to reactionary forces' assaults on all human rights.

As for the United States itself, where the battles over abortion and gender are inextricably part of the swirling unresolved political crisis and potential Constitutional meltdown, we'll also look briefly here at some too little-covered facts of how U.S. policies impact the rights and lives of women outside this country's borders.

In Iran, the regime is in open warfare against the population. The response to the murder of Mahsa (Jina) Amini has become an uprising against the entire apparatus of the "Islamic Republic." Dictating what women choose to wear is basic to the drive for complete social control of what everyone, especially youth, are allowed to do or dream.

"Women. Life. Freedom!" is a women-led

revolution that now engages the struggles of Iran's youth, Kurdish people and strategic sectors of the working class.

Will it triumph? Right now there's no way to know. What we can say, even though the murderous brutality of the Iranian theocracy and Revolutionary Guards knows no limits, is that Iran will not return to society's former half-voluntary compliance with the dictatorship.

In Afghanistan, the most vicious elements of the Taliban – who exercise decisive veto power over the regime –seek to nullify the very personhood of women. Deprived of access to university and even high school education, barred from employment in public service or by international aid organizations, they are left dependent or destitute. Among the results this winter are threatened deaths by starvation or freezing of hundreds of thousands of Afghans whom assistance can no longer reach.

This heartbreak and disaster are fairly well-covered in mainstream media. What's too easily forgotten, so all the more important to recall here, is that "liberation" of Afghan women served as a pretext for the U.S. and allied invasion following the 9/11 2001 attacks – after imperialist interventions and rivalries from the 1980s on had already brought Afghanistan to the edge of catastrophe.

The delusion of liberating women – or anyone else – in Afghanistan from above and from outside played no small part in the development of the present tragedy.

In Ukraine, not only are rape as well as mass murders of civilians committed by Russian invading forces. Vladimir Putin himself calls Moscow's war a defence of "traditional values" against such perversions as queer rights and the

mythical "dozens of genders" supposedly recognised in the West. Putin's ultra-reactionary ravings are the natural accompaniment to the denial of Ukraine's right to exist, with the genocidal implications of that doctrine. The invaders' rape and massacre perpetrated against the people of Ukraine feed back into the savage escalation of the already intense repression of LGBT people within Russia.

Closer to Home

If the examples of Iran, Afghanistan and Russian atrocities in Ukraine are the most immediately visible cases of the extinction of women's rights and the consequences, there are plenty of instances closer to our own situation. The point is not to identify the "worst" case – as such comparisons are essentially meaningless – but to examine some common features.

Take Poland, in the heart of Europe: Extreme restrictions on abortion access have been imposed by the right wing "Law and Justice" party in alliance with the Catholic church. These measures are accompanied – not coincidentally – by severe weakening of the power of the judiciary to limit anti-democratic legislative extremism. That's also occurred in Hungary's self-declared "illiberal democracy" and is now well underway in the Israeli state.

Two-thirds of Polish citizens support abortion rights – very similar to the percentage in the United States. Women-led protests have taken to the streets in large numbers in Warsaw and other cities and towns, but so far failed to overturn the government's measures.

The full toll in women's deaths and permanent injuries remains unknown. Since 2021 at least two women in publicised cases, Anieszka T. and Izabela Sajbor, died after abortion care was denied even though the foetuses were either unviable or already dead.

In Ireland, popular revulsion over the 2012 death of Savita Halappanavar, who was denied a medically essential abortion until it was too late, led to striking the anti-abortion provision from the country's Constitution.

In Israel, tens of thousands are taking to the streets weekly against the ultra-racist governing coalition's move to strip the powers of the Supreme Court. Women's and queer rights are relatively well-entrenched in Israel – for Jewish citizens – and less likely to be immediately on the chopping block.

The first casualties in this case are the already-vanishing shreds of court protection for Palestinians in the occupied territories, and the (limited) civil rights of Arab citizens including their parties' ability to run in Israeli elections (which the Supreme Court has reinstated by overruling bans imposed by parliamentary decrees). There are elements in the "religious Zionism" bloc, however, for whom gender and especially queer rights are blasphemy and ultimate targets for extinction under the "Jewish state."

Central America is a particularly gruesome arena in the women's health battleground. The new government of president Xiaomara Castro in Honduras promised to loosen the country's deadly abortion ban, but hasn't yet succeeded. The situations in Nicaragua and El Salvador are grim: When left wing governments were in power (the Sandinistas in 1980s Nicaragua, the FMLN party elected in El Salvador in the '90s after the civil war), they failed to take anti-abortion laws off the books.

Nicaragua today is ruled by the right wing presidentialist dictatorship of Daniel Ortega (see "Repression Continues to Grow in Nicaragua" by William I. Robinson, ATC 222) and El Salvador by the reactionary government of Nayib Bukele. Women in El Salvador who suffer miscarriages are subject to prosecution and up to 30-year prison terms, provoking widespread outrage. Not coincidentally, under this repressive

regime, water protectors are also being prosecuted (see page 2 of this issue).

The Not-"100% American" Scene

In our own partially democratic country called the United States of America, a woman's right to control her own body is constrained legally by the state she lives in, practically by her county of residence – where abortion care may be unavailable even if legal – and financially by her capacity to travel if she needs to gain access beyond state lines.

The long, instructive and often heroic struggle for abortion rights and expanded other essential rights and services – against racist sterilization abuse, for adequate paid parental leave and free quality childcare, for birth control and sex education – is discussed by Dianne Feeley in this issue of Against the Current. Much of that feminist liberation agenda remains unfulfilled, of course, especially in the era of neoliberal "free market" dogma, falling real wages and stagnant living standards, and capital's assault on labour rights and unions.

Following the Supreme Court Dobbs ruling, the right wing aims to hurl women back to the age when unwanted pregnancy, or a pregnancy with complications, meant terror. Where they control state governments, attempts to criminalise medical (pharmaceutical) abortion, out-of-state travel for abortion access, even contraception, are on their agenda – along with ever more vicious assaults on trans youth, banning books and education on Black history and U.S. racism, and other malicious mischief.

What often gets less attention than it deserves is the international impact of the United States' reproductive rights battleground. "A half-century-old U.S. law is stripping women of rights they are legally entitled to in their home countries," writes Anu Kumar ("Why is America

Preventing Legal Abortions in Ethiopia?" The New York Times, 10/23/22)

The reason is a particularly vicious 1973 post-Roe backlash legislation known as the (Senator Jesse) Helms Amendment, appropriately carrying the name of its sponsor, one of the most racist as well as misogynist politicians in our recent history. It prohibits U.S. foreign aid funding for "abortions as a method of family planning."

Under a restrictive interpretation that goes beyond even the language of the amendment, Kumar explains, the law "instead incorrectly has been applied as an outright ban on all abortions." It has also been interpreted to mean that clinics receiving U.S. funding cannot even mention abortion. And even though only U.S. funding is directly affected, in many poor and rural regions "the complication of securing other funding that could be used for abortions is too difficult, which means the entire health facility simply does not offer abortions at all."

The heavy hand of these restrictions is felt all the more strongly because U.S. funding of family planning overseas amounts to 40-50% of the global total. In Ethiopia, Anu Kumar reports, her organization IPAS (Partners for Reproductive Justice) states that "the United States funded about 30 percent of total family planning foreign aid in Ethiopia from 2018 to 2020, but that funding is spread among more than 45 percent of health facilities in the country."

Such is the case for example at the Shekebedo Health Centre in southwestern Ethiopia, a country where abortion is legal. The Centre's partial funding by the U.S. Agency for International Development "has stopped the clinic from offering abortions to Ethiopian women."

The global harm is enormous, says Kumar: "In countries that accept U.S. family planning aid and where abortion is legal

under some circumstances, more than 19 million unsafe abortions occur annually – more than half of the global total" (emphasis added) – resulting in complications including deadly ones like sepsis that claim some 16,000 women's and girls' lives annually.

The alternation of U.S. presidential administrations, with Republicans applying more restrictive and Democrats more liberal directives, makes it even more difficult to implement coherent policies.

This is blood on the hands of the U.S. Congress, the grotesquely mislabelled "pro-life" movement, and the executive branch, including president Biden, who at least "could issue federal guidelines to clarify that Helms permits U.S. funds for abortion care in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment" and "ensure that clinics in countries where abortion is legal understand that U.S. rules allow them to offer abortion information and counselling."

To see what difference a sane and decent policy could produce, consider the case of Benin, an African nation where the number of botched abortions declined after access to abortions was broadened (Elian Peltier, The New York Times, 11/13/22).

While most countries in Africa restrict or ban abortion – South Africa, Mozambique, Cape Verde and Tunisia being among the exceptions – the tide there is slowly turning toward abortion rights, despite fears that the overturn of Roe in the United States may hold it back.

It's important to say here that the very real authoritarian menace globally and in the United States, with all the murderous attacks on women's lives, LGBTQ people and (especially in dozens of U.S. state legislatures) transgender young people, is only one side of the picture. Victories are being won, whether large (as in Ireland, Mexico, etc.) or

more modest as in U.S. state ballot referenda.

Most important of all is that everywhere, the fight is on — women along with queer and trans people will not quietly accept oppressors' and cynical politicians' denial of their humanity, dignity, agency and rights. The movements are decisive: When the targets of oppression stand up for themselves, they attract allies and solidarity, and their struggles cannot be pushed back into isolation, silence and shame — as so many generations of women have suffered undergoing forced birth or deadly illegal abortions.

The lesson everywhere is that women's rights, gender and trans rights, queer rights are human rights. They rise or fall together. In a world of rising authoritarian rule and right wing menace, "Women. Life. Freedom!" means all of us.

Source: Editorial March-April 2023, ATC 223
https://againstthecurrent.org/atc223/womens-rights-human-rights/

International Women's Day inspirational reading:

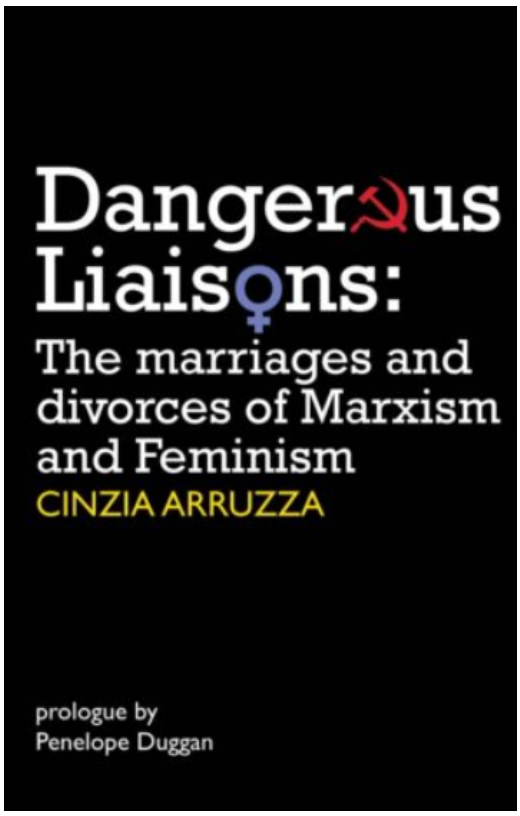
“Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism”

For International Women’s Day 2023, our friends at Resistance Books are promoting a book to inspire you – **Cinzia Arruza’s “Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism”.**

An accessible introduction to the relationship between the workers’ movement and the women’s movement. The first part is historical, the second is theoretical. Historical examples range from the mid-19th century to the 1970s and include events, debates, and key personalities from China, Russia, the USA, France, Italy, Spain, and Britain. It shows time and again, the controversial, often difficult relationship between feminism and Marxism.

The theoretical questions discussed include the origins of women’s oppression, domestic labour, dual systems theory, performativity, and differentialism. Women’s oppression is a structural element of the division of labour and one of the direct factors through which capitalism not only reinforces its ideological dominance but also organises the exploitation and reproduction of labour. The integration of patriarchal relations and capitalism has led to their radical transformation—in the family, in terms of women’s place in production, in sexual relations, and with respect to sexual identity.

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Marxism needs to probe complex processes: ongoing transformations and crises, a global context creating an increasingly feminised workforce, and changing relations between men and women. It is a mistake to submerge gender into class or to believe that freedom from exploitation automatically brings about women's liberation and the ending of sexual roles. It is equally wrong to think the class question can be removed and gender made the main enemy. The author believes passionately in the need to combine gender and class politics.

Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism – Reviews

> *"Although Cinzia Arruzza calls her aim "modest," her book is anything but. She provides a masterful survey of the vexed relations between feminism and socialism over the course of*

more than two centuries. The result is not only a lucid overview but also a penetrating intervention into current debates. Perfectly timed to enlighten new generations of activists and theorists, Arruzza's book offers the best short introduction to a question that is as relevant as ever today: How, in the wake of a capitalist crisis of global dimensions, can struggles against male domination be made to synergize with struggles against neoliberalism?"

NANCY FRASER, PROF. NEW SCHOOL, NEW YORK

"Dangerous Liaisons offers an acute, critical and refreshingly open analysis of feminist theories and, best of all, links the development of theory to the historical and contemporary political issues facing women activists. A perfect book for students but also for anyone seeking to learn more about the ongoing dialogue between Marxism(s) and feminism(s). Aruzza's presentation of complicated theoretical debates is fair, accessible, and lively; her wide-ranging historical account hits the highlights (and lows) of feminist engagements with the revolutionary left across Europe and in the US."

JOHANNA BRENNER, PROF. EMERITUS, PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

"a well written book and ideal for anyone interested in the political and theoretical history of the relationship between feminism and Marxism."

MARX AND PHILOSOPHY REVIEW OF BOOKS

Solidarity with the protest movement in Iran!

Statement of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International
Since 16 September Iran has been thrown into turmoil by widespread protests against the policies of the ruling clique. They were triggered by the brutal murder of the young woman Jîna (Mahsa) Amini, who was beaten to death by the "morality police". The duration and the expansion of the demonstrations to all parts of the country and almost all strata of the population testify to a deep-seated discontent and anger that goes beyond rejection of the regime's deeply restrictive dress code for women. The causes also lie in a social plight that has been worsening for years for large sections of the population and in massive repression.

Unlike previous unrest, such as the rebellion against electoral fraud (2009) or protests against rising fuel prices (2019), the rallying cry in the forefront is "Down with the Islamic Republic!" After a month of protests the movement is still going strong and spreading.

Compared to past decades, the social hardship among the population is even greater today. More than half of the population lives below the subsistence level and can only survive with a lot of difficulties. Health care has become even more inadequate than it already was. The ecological damage is enormous, with severe water shortages, desertification and deforestation affecting the rural population particularly, and high levels of air and water pollution in the cities.

What is striking and enthusing is that the movement is led by young women, including school students. This is fed by the history of women's struggles and movements in Iran since before the days of the 1979 revolution. Popular support is

based on a now widely shared hatred of the regime and of the corrupt theocratic clique that dominates and exploits the country, enriching itself to the point of becoming dollar billionaires.

The fact that the movement has lasted for so long and on such a broad scale, despite the harsh repression, can only be explained by the anger felt above all by the younger generations. Broad sections of the students and pupils who are resisting their confinement and taking to the streets for a different life.

The second specificity of today's wave of protest is that it has spread from Jîna (Mahsa) Amini's home city in Kurdistan throughout the country. This is why the Kurdish chant "Jin Jiyan Azadi" translated to Persian as "Zan Zendegi Azadi" has become the main slogan of the movement today. In Kurdistan, the rejection of the theocratic regime and the struggle for self-determination have a long tradition and are being expressed with force. What is new is the scale of the protests in Baluchistan, where social oppression and massive poverty are the worst in the country. The repression there manifested itself, for example, on 7 October when more than 100 people were shot dead during a demonstration in the provincial capital Zahedan.

And a third prominent feature should not be overlooked: For a week now, calls for a political strike have been increasing, something that has not happened for more than 35 years, since the crushing of workers' councils and left organisations. A first section of the oil industry in the southern Khuzistan province has been on strike for a week, evoking memories of 1979, when the oil workers' strike was the prelude to a nationwide general strike. However, the leaderships of the main independent unions are almost without exception in prison.

It is solely up to the people of Iran to determine their own

destiny, with full democratic rights and gender equality, with religious freedom and secularism, defending the rights of all minorities and working for social and economic justice.

We therefore call for:

– Broadening the international support of all progressive and left-wing forces for the protest and revolt movement in Iran against the religious dictatorship, for the defence of democratic freedoms, and for the dismantling of the police and militias that repress the individual freedoms notably of women.

– Expressions of internationalist solidarity such as messages from women's movements, trade unions, student associations and so on to give political and moral support to the movement. We encourage trade unions to discuss with their counterparts practical forms of solidarity; universities to call on their counterparts to protect the lives and freedom of their students; women's and student movements to make links with movements in Iran.

– Support for public demonstrations of solidarity with the movement on the call of the progressive forces in the Iranian communities in exile, this is crucial.

– An end to all repression in Iran and for human rights organisation to monitor the crimes committed by the state in their repression of the population.

– For the right to humanitarian visas primarily for persecuted women and girls and LGBTIQ people, fleeing the repression in Iran.
Woman, life, freedom!

Zan, Zendegi, Azadi

Jin, Jiyan, Azadi

18 October 2022

Executive Bureau

Reprinted from https://fourth.international/en/566/middle-east/475

Photo: Uprising in Tehran Sept 2022 Copyright Darafsh / Wikimedia commons

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Jîna 'Mahsa' Amini Was Kurdish And That Matters – Say her Kurdish name.

In 1852, *writes Meral Çiçek,* the 35-years old women's rights activist Tahirih Ghoratolein was executed by the Iranian regime in Tehran for two things: her Bábí faith and unveiling herself. Her last words were: "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women."

Almost exactly 170 years later, in the same city, a 22-year-old woman died after being arrested by the so-called guidance patrol, Islamic religious police who adhere to strict interpretations of sharia law. Her offence was not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards. When the police detained her, the woman's brother explained they weren't from Tehran and were unaware of the city's rules (the family were visiting from Saqqez, a Kurdish city in the west, close to the border of Iraqi Kurdistan) to no avail: she was taken to a police station anyway. There, her family allege, she was "insulted and tortured", collapsing before eventually being taken to hospital. Upon arrival doctors discovered the woman had suffered "brain death". Two days later, she suffered a cardiac arrest and was unable to be resuscitated.

The woman's name was Jîna, which means 'life' in Kurdish. *Jîn* (and its equivalent *Jiyan*) is etymologically related to *Jin*, the Kurdish word for woman. But the world has come to know her better in death by her Iranian name: Mahsa Amini.

Shortly after Amini's violent death on 16 September, protests broke out and spread from the Kurdish parts of Iran to the whole country and the world. Demonstrators chanted the Kurdish slogan "jin, jiyan, azadî" – "woman, life, freedom". But in news reports, particularly Western ones, Jîna Amini's Kurdish identity has been erased – she is described as an Iranian woman and her 'official' Persian name 'Mahsa' – which for her family and friends existed only on state-documents –is the one in headlines. Calls to "say her name" echo in real life and across social media but unwittingly obscure Jîna's real name and, in doing so, her Kurdish identity.

Iranian state discrimination against Kurds includes a widespread ban of Kurdish names which forces many families to register their children officially with non-Kurdish names, while maintaining their actual names at home. This in turn fragments the experience of many Kurds and creates an 'official-legal' and an 'unofficial-illegal' identity. The authentic ethnic-cultural identity loses its validity and a name that says nothing about your roots identifies you.

Some people that insist on calling Jîna Amini by her state-approved name Mahsa effectively argue that she did not lose her life under detention because she was Kurdish, but only because she was a woman. Therefore – according to the argument – it is not necessary or significant to call her by her Kurdish name.

Iran is an antidemocratic state, based on brutal rule. Anyone who is not part of the apparatus of oppression is in danger – no matter what sex, religion or ethnic group they belong to. Some are even more vulnerable than others. This is

particularly the case for women and for Kurds.

It is likely that the immoral 'morality police' that arrested Jîna on 13 September at the entry of Shahid Haghani Expressway in the presence of her brother (who has also an unofficial Kurdish and an official Persian name) were aware of her ethnic identity. It is possible that they treated her with particular brutality because of it. It is likely that she resisted the insults and curses of the officers so much *because* of her identity and political consciousness as a Kurdish woman.

But regardless of whether or not her Kurdish identity played a significant role in the detention and brutal violence that led to Amini's death, understating or concealing her ethnic origin represents a reproduction of colonial politics of the Iranian regime towards the Kurdish people. This attitude is a distillation of the power and suppression of the majority nation – even when expressed by well-meaning Persian feminists.

Amini's death has seen Kurdish slogans calling for women's liberation and revolution echo around the world. "Jin, jiyan, azadî" – and its translations – has reverberated through crowds and demonstrations held in solidarity with freedom-seeking women in Iran. Even in Afghanistan women chanted the slogan, despite attacks on demonstrators by the Taliban.

This chant originated in the Kurdistan women's liberation movement. It embodies the movement's goal: to liberate life through a women's revolution. It was first chanted collectively by Kurdish women on 8 March 2006, at gatherings marking International Women's Day across Turkey. After this came a period in which annual campaigns challenged patriarchal mindsets and misogynist practices within Kurdish society. This period of intense struggle against patriarchy culminated in the Rojava revolution 10-years-ago, on 19 July 2012, which sent the slogan "jin, jiyan, azadî" echoing around the world, beyond the borders of Kurdistan.

The Kurdish women's movement does not aim to monopolise this slogan, in contrast it aims to universalise it in the struggle for women's democratic confederalism worldwide. Nevertheless, its roots and context should be acknowledged. Otherwise, we run the risk of emptying our slogans of active struggle and allowing them to lose their meaning. As I write this piece, women of the German party CDU/CSU – under whose government the Kurdish liberation movement has been criminalised the most – are protesting Jîna's killing in Berlin, holding posters with the German translation of "jin, jiyan, azadî".

Jîna Amini was a Kurdish woman. Kurdish women have fought so hard not to be erased in life; do not let their stories be rewritten in death.

Meral Çiçek is a Kurdish political activist and journalist.

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Bodies United

red clydesider reports on the ongoing struggle for bodily autonomy and specifically the fight for safe zones around abortion services and health clinics in Scotland.

The latest attack on reproductive rights in the United States of America has stirred a fury that has leapt beyond the borders of the troubled republic. This is no surprise. Whatever happens, over there have repercussions that are felt all across the globe, and these latest events show how easily cherished democratic and civil liberties can be rolled back by determined reactionaries and fundamentalists. As such, they

stand as a stark warning to the rest of the world. Whatever has been gained by struggle, can only be protected and sheltered by struggle. This fact cannot be ignored.

Here in Scotland, anger at the assault on Roe vs Wade has mingled with a home-grown cause, the fight for buffer zones around healthcare sites offering abortion services that would insulate them from anti-abortion protests. Since 2017, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and Back Off Scotland have recorded a series of repeated protests at seven different hospitals and clinics across Scotland. Just this year, there was a candlelight vigil of around one hundred people outside the Maternity Wing of Glasgow's Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, and in recent months smaller pickets by preachers have been plaguing clinics like Sandyford, with those using the clinic being harassed and condemned as they approach the building.

To address this, the Green MSP Gillian Mackay has proposed a bill for the Scottish Parliament to establish legally protected safe access zones of a perimeter of 150m for abortion clinics and healthcare settings, in order to protect the persons and the privacy of those going to these clinics for abortions. Within the buffer zones, the bill aims to prohibit behaviour such as impeding or blocking somebody's path or an entrance to abortion services, intimidating or harassing people, and photographing or filming a person within the zone. There is currently a consultation for the bill taking place online.

As the consultation progresses and the bill moves through parliament, however, there is still a continuing menace being faced by clients of clinics all across Scotland, as at Sandyford, where the previously mentioned religious protesters have tended to make so much noise that the staff within cannot actually give consultations, check-ups and treatment to patients, healthcare that also includes rape counselling and sexual health services for the LGBTQ+ community. Action must

therefore be taken in the meantime to give clinics support, protection and solidarity against harassment. As the feminist movement agitates for political change at the level of rights and legislation, there must also be a spirited defence of treatment at the ground level.

Beth Douglas is a woman that has been involved with great energy in exactly these struggles, and it's for that reason that I sat down to talk with her about the fight for buffer zones.

To begin with, I asked Beth about who she is, and what she does. In the broadest terms, she describes herself as an activist, with a particular focus on equality campaigning and bodily autonomy. In addition to her work on the abortion rights issue, she fights for trans health care and for the destigmatisation and decriminalisation of sex work. In more narrow party terms, or, as Beth put it, "If you want to push me into a box", she is a member of the Scottish Green Party and a co-convener of its LGTBQ+ wing, the Rainbow Greens.

Not just this, but she has long been active in protest against how Pride marches are often co-opted by corporate money and used as an image-laundering opportunity for big business and the state, particularly arms traders and the military. Indeed, those of you who followed or participated in Glasgow's radical scene in the 2010s may remember her as one of the "Pride Five", who were unjustly arrested at Glasgow Pride 2017 for protesting against capitalist influence on the event and the participation of a Police Scotland bloc in the march. Perhaps a few of you may even have been there at the courtroom solidarity demonstrations.

And, as you may have gathered from her advocacy for trans health care, Beth is a transgender woman. How does this facet of her identity shape her conception of feminism? What perspectives does she, a trans woman, bring to this movement? And in what ways do the struggle for trans rights link up with

the struggle for abortion rights? I was particularly interested to find out, so I got right into the questions about her work and her views.

As for many of us, American events have been a painful sight for Beth to witness. But it isn't simply a well-meaning sympathy that spurs her into action around abortion rights. What primarily drives her is her own experience of the ways in which society constricts bodies to fit rigid gender and sexual norms.

"As a trans person," Beth says, "I am very used to being told by the state what I can and cannot do with my body," so she is eager to fight against any attempt by the state to tell others what they are allowed to do with theirs.

"As a trans person," Beth says, "I am very used to being told by the state what I can and cannot do with my body," so she is eager to fight against any attempt by the state to tell others what they are allowed to do with theirs.

Additionally, she recognises that these political issues are not neatly separated from each other: "We are about to see millions of people lose their right to reproductive healthcare across America, and it is horrific to see people being robbed of their bodily autonomy. And even though I will never need to have an abortion, it still has a knock-on effect and matters to me."

The strengthening of patriarchal state control over bodies, the denial of free choice for people to make decisions about themselves, only gives the state a stronger position from which to police other aspects of gender and sexuality, to keep anyone who dissents from a strict patriarchal idea of "proper" gender and sexual roles in line by force. Therefore, Beth concludes that "if you weaken bodily autonomy on abortion you weaken it for trans people too and vice versa".

It is a stance that calls to mind that slogan of the workers' movement, "an injury to one is an injury to all," or the admirable sentiment of old Bakunin, that the freedom of others, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation. These are fine socialist principles from which to go forward, and they animate Beth's political practice.

To return to actions of solidarity: It is with a grimace that Beth concedes that "unfortunately, American politics are global politics." Indeed, one can scarcely avoid being shaken by even the slightest stumbles of an imperial giant.

Feeling those tremors, Beth really wanted to do something to show solidarity with her American sisters. So, she and another trans woman, Heather, got together a demonstration at the United States Consulate after the Edinburgh May Day march on May 7th. With a couple of days' notice, the demo brought together about eighty people, and the speakers included activists from Backoff Scotland, the Green MSP Gillian MacKay and a member of the Scottish Trans Alliance.

People from the crowd also took the mic, and some of them were Americans who spoke about how they felt sad and desperate for their loved ones over there, and how they felt scared to go back to their home country because of the way things are going.

Not only this, but speakers from the crowd also talked about how they themselves had been confronted by bigoted protesters on their way into healthcare settings when going in for not just abortions, but for STI checks, menopause checks, and HIV check-ups and rape counselling.

Testimony like this served to underline the contributions of Gillian MacKay and Backoff Scotland, who raised the demand for Buffer Zones in their speeches. It wouldn't even be a week before yet more service users were being harassed outside

clinics, as would happen to someone close to Beth just days after the consulate demonstration.

Beth's friend was on their way to the Sandyford clinic to receive rape counselling, and right outside the building were two religious preachers, who yelled at them to "stop killing babies!" as they entered. The two preachers had their own sound system, and they were so loud that Sandyford couldn't offer care on one whole side of their building for that day.

Hearing of this from her friend, Beth was furious and immediately went over to Sandyford to film the preachers and expose what they were doing on social media. This footage would quickly find its way to the national press, and with the word getting out on Twitter, more counter-protesters came down to join Beth and help drown out the preachers. She remembered hearing "a whole cocktail of bigotry coming out of these men's mouths", including rants about Islam, and at one point when some gay men came out of Sandyford and were told by the preachers that "they had chosen a life of sin."

She remembered hearing "a whole cocktail of bigotry coming out of these men's mouths", including rants about Islam, and at one point when some gay men came out of Sandyford and were told by the preachers that "they had chosen a life of sin."

Eventually, faced with opposition from the crowd, the preachers packed up and left. "In the end," says Beth, "it wasn't the police who moved these bigots, but the people who showed up and argued with them. The whole time the police didn't take action". That kind of inaction, Beth argued, shows why buffer zones are hugely important: "The patients who use Sandyford, whatever they are using the clinic for, are just trying to get healthcare, and if we allow people to stand outside and harass them then we are denying their right to healthcare."

It wasn't long before Beth was back at the United States

Consulate agitating on this theme again. After the first consulate demo, there was an American woman named Lindsay Jaacks who wanted to organise another protest at the consulate in a week's time. She asked Beth and Heather for help, so Beth got the Scottish Activist Legal Project (SCALP) involved to do legal observing. Thinking of how the Irish police have consistently hassled and targeted abortion protesters over there, Beth was keen to involve SCALP going forward.

Demo two had a similar number of people, but a different crowd. Following on from Edinburgh May Day, demo one was mostly younger people, but at the second demo, there were some new faces. Now, while the first protest was taking place, gender-critical activists were not present, instead holding a lunch meetup over on Glasgow Green, a tradition inaugurated by the ultra-rich Blairite J. K. Rowling and aped by her middle-class adherents.

When Beth expressed surprise and disappointment on Twitter that, in a situation when women's rights are being rolled back, gender-criticalists are more focused on hobnobbing and complaining about the Gender Recognition Act than showing up to demonstrations, she was met with odd accusations her criticisms amounted to "daring to tell women they couldn't have lunch."

In any case, it seems the consciences of some gender-criticalists were stung into action by this, and they turned up to the second demo at the consulate. This is something Beth welcomed: "It doesn't matter if they hate me or not, the important thing is we work together to protect the very concept of bodily autonomy- You can't attack the bodily autonomy of one group and expect it to remain for yourself."

> *"It doesn't matter if they hate me or not, the important thing is we work together to protect the very concept of bodily autonomy- You can't attack the bodily autonomy of one group and expect it to remain for yourself."*

Unfortunately though, when Beth spoke on the microphone, to talk about how the American religious right has been using its money and resources to stoke division in the feminist movement, and about how when bodily autonomy is weakened for one group it is for all groups, she was heckled by the gender-criticalists in the crowd.

The heckles were predictable, simplistic and parochial. To Beth's linking of struggles, she heard shouts that the issue "was just women's' bodies" and women's' bodies alone. When Beth spoke about showing solidarity with our trans brothers and non-binary siblings, who also need the right to abortion, the gender criticalists shouted "they're women!"

The first set of heckles can easily be dispensed with by pointing out that, given, as we have seen, that the range of treatments impacted by anti-abortion protests goes beyond abortion to HIV check-ups, rape counselling, LGTBQ+ health services and so on, it is clear that the Buffer Zone struggle is overall a fight against a generalised assault on reproductive/sexual healthcare which expresses itself primarily as an abortion rights issue.

The gender-criticalists who shout about the issue just being women's' bodies have not paid close enough attention to what is happening at Sandyford and elsewhere. Additionally, they wilfully ignore that the abortion struggle is an issue closely tied to all other struggles against rigid patriarchal gender and sexual norms and that it represents one front in the fight to resist a largescale reaction by the patriarchy against any challenge to its power.

Is it a coincidence that the same Republican Party zealots leading the charge against abortion in the United States are also the same bigots stoking a panic about LGBTQ+ people? That these are the same Jim Crow capitalists that ruthlessly oppose the Black Lives Matter movement, striking workers and tenants unions? Of course not!

As for the second set of heckles, Beth is frustrated about how the gender criticalists are obsessing over whether trans men are actually women, and so making the struggle about identity rather than rights- In doing so, she argues, “you are changing the argument from ‘Everyone deserves abortion’ to ‘Are trans men actually women’”. She considers it a distraction from the real core of the issue, one that is utterly pointless given the high stakes and the urgency of the situation.

> *the heckling behaviour of the gender-criticalists toward Beth provides a clear example of unsystematic, narrow, single-issue thinking that fails to connect movements into a robust united front, and which foolishly rejects solidarity from other oppressed groups.*

In summary, the heckling behaviour of the gender-criticalists toward Beth provides a clear example of unsystematic, narrow, single-issue thinking that fails to connect movements into a robust united front, and which foolishly rejects solidarity from other oppressed groups.

Thankfully, a better example of political unity was close at hand. Another important event Beth wanted to highlight was the Trans Pride march in Paisley on the 20th of May. Members of the Scottish Greens, along with members of other parties, brought along a banner reading “Trans and Queer People Support Buffer Zones” and took it on the march.

“It was very heart-warming to see how many people marched behind that banner,” Beth recalled, speaking of the warm response they got from attendees of Trans Pride. For her, the march served as a clear marker that the trans community is ready to support abortion rights and back the demands of the feminist movement for the protection and the advancement of those rights.

“This is how solidarity is supposed to work.” Beth feels that for some lefties, “Solidarity has become the new ‘thoughts and

prayers,’ a slogan you can say as a token gesture of support without actually doing anything. “True solidarity,” Beth argues, “is waving your flag for one group but campaigning for another, whether that’s trans people fighting for the bodily autonomy of all people, or lesbians and gays supporting the miners’ strike”, a clear nod to the legendary Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) group of the 1980’s.

So, where next for the struggle from here?

Since my interview with Beth, she certainly has been busy, organising further demonstrations against the continued targeting of the Sandyford Clinic by fundamentalist preachers. While buffer zones are being sought through parliament, it is essential that the movement is able to organise for the protection of abortion clinics wherever and whenever.

Along with concrete defence of clinics goes the agitation for political change. Beth called on everyone reading this article to fill out the consultation as soon as possible: “We need as many people filling it in as we can!” The link can be found below, and I emphatically urge all of you reading this to complete it, and help show the Scottish Parliament how crucial Buffer Zones are.

With the Summer Pride season coming up, Beth was keen to spread the call for buffer zones all over Scotland. “We’re going to keep using that buffer zone banner. It’s important it goes to as many prides as possible.” She aims to bring the buffer zone struggle wherever it can be brought, to demos, marches and events of all sorts. “We really need to get around and defend the idea of bodily autonomy wherever it is threatened regardless of who or where. If you can deny that to someone you can deny anything to them.”

I ended by asking Beth how people can show support for the cause and how they can keep up to date with her. Her first port of call was the Safe Access (Abortion Services) Scotland

Bill Consultation, which can be found here The Consultation runs until the 6th August 2022. Once again, Beth was eager to point people in its direction. “It is important that as many people fill in the buffer zone consultation as possible,” Beth said, and she implores all of you to take part in it as soon as you can. As well as that, she directs everyone reading this to follow and support the work of Back Off Scotland.

If you want to keep up with Beth’s own work, check out Beth’s Twitter, her recent article for Ungagged and the Twitter of the Rainbow Greens.



And finally, if you want to hear from the woman herself, make sure to come along to Anticapitalist Resistance’s Zoom meeting, “The Overturn of Roe vs Wade: The Struggle for Reproductive Justice in the US” which takes place on June 30th at 7.30 pm. The speakers include Zora Monico, an activist with the Michigan Coalition for Reproductive Liberation and co-founder of WWN, Whenever We’re Needed, Kerry Abel, Chair of Abortion Rights UK, and Beth Douglas whose work you are quite

acquainted with by now. Signup here and share on Facebook.

Trans Liberation and Feminism

Oppression is not a direct result of physiological features but the social role assigned in general to those who have those features, and while the gender binary oppresses us all, it particularly oppresses those for whom it is a daily prison and for whom their/our daily transgression leads to physical and mental violence in the family, in the workplace and on the streets. That's among the many arguments in this document on support for Trans Liberation recently agreed by the Socialist Resistance Editorial Board (and endorsed by ecosocialist.scot). It was originally published here

Back to basics

Our understanding of the term gender is that it is separate from the term sex, the latter refers to physiological features, the former to a socially constructed role. To quote Simone de Beauvoir: 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman'. This has always been the general position of Marxist feminists – oppression is not a direct result of physiological features but the social role assigned in general to those who have those features.

There is obviously a whole lot of nuance available in understanding HOW the fact that MOST people with the physiological features identified with female give birth and nurture children impacted the social role of people with those same physiological (or perceived to be) features. The Fourth international 1979 resolution on women's liberation does not pretend to lay out a complete picture. However it is clear

that our analysis and strategic orientation is not that of what we call radical feminists, i.e. that men are the root cause of women's oppression and thus the enemy.

We think neither sex nor gender are determinant in how people perceive themselves, it is possible for people to reject one or both of them and many people do to greater or lesser extent. Women's oppression does not derive from our sex or biology rather from the societies in which we live that require us to have a primary role in social reproduction which plays an important role both in paid and unpaid labour in 'socially necessary labour time', the labour time that is required to keep production going for profit in capitalist economies.

Social reproduction is the reproduction of the labour power of the working class to serve its role in the capitalist economic system. A part of the production of socially necessary labour is done outside of the labour market in the home where it is not directly covered by wages. It is not physical reproduction only but also basic education, nursing, caring, cooking and cleaning of the family home and care, not only for children but others in our households that need support and assistance. Moreover, when women enter into the capitalist labour market, they often wind up trapped in employment which is based on traditional women's labour which is then viewed as unskilled and of little value and therefore worse paid that traditionally 'male' jobs.

Marxist feminists do not usually use the term 'the patriarchy' and indeed argue against its use explaining that the term gives rise to a conception that there are two systems: patriarchy and 'class society' (or 'capitalism', depending on which Marxists from which tradition you are discussing this with). There are a number of works on the question of 'dual systems' theory and indeed Lise Vogel's seminal work provides one way forward, and is the root of the development of social reproduction theory, which is explicitly Marxist, and called

‘Towards a unitary theory’.

This is not counterposed in any way to also adopting an intersectional approach also within a Marxist framework in which different forms of oppression coexist, reinforce and sometimes contradict each other, and in which we have a political responsibility to stand with the oppressed, working with those differences and turning them from weakness into strength.

A general agreement with this analytical approach is important because it affects how we act politically. If women’s oppression derives from social constructs we can organise to change them, but if they are derived from biology then our options are much more limited.

As we understand it, those who call themselves ‘gender critical’ reject these positions and link the definition of woman **directly** to the physiological features. Note that we have not used the term ‘Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists’ (TERF) in this document, though it is used by some trans people to describe those that organise against them. The term is confusing because there are radical feminists who are trans inclusive and other feminists who would define themselves as socialist feminists who organise on the basis of ‘sex-based rights’ and are therefore trans (and intersex) exclusive. It is not helpful to use a term that people see as an insult when attempting rational discussion with those who may be influenced by these ideas.

The ‘gender critical’ people also demand specific rights for those born with (or assigned as born with, if the ‘gender critical’ people even envisage that possibility that things are assigned rather than simply wired in) the physiological features judged as women’s – what they call ‘sex based rights’. Such a road is dangerous – for what it would imply for other physical differences e.g. for disabled people or intersex people as well as trans people – and also completely

unnecessary as we can't think of a circumstance where we would argue that rights should be granted on such a physiological basis. Furthermore, there is a hidden political trajectory in the argument of these groups, that for trans people to gain rights means taking them away from cis (non trans) women – this is like arguing for crumbs not the whole bloody bakery.

Binaries and determinism

Acceptance of the gender binary – by which we mean that throughout the natural and human world there are only ever two sexes and two genders – and that the sex assigned to everyone at birth is always in line with their physiology which is assumed in itself to be always uncomplicated – would also politically limit our options. There are many reputable articles which show that there is much evidence to the contrary in the biological sciences for example: https://www.nature.com/news/sex-redefined-1.16943 https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/stop-using-phony-science-to-justify-transphobia/

As comrades have pointed, out there are parallels between some of the discussion in this frame and that about race and biology. It's surely inconvertible on the left that biological determinism has long been used to justify imperialism and racism. Notions of 'women's brains' seem to us to have terrifying parallels with the deeply reactionary notions of 'negroid brains' and so on. The need to think outside the binary is not only based on an understanding of biological sciences but also on the complexities of different human societies. See for example: http://www.gendertrust.org.uk/gender-concepts-around-the-world/.

Feminism in its many forms has always questioned gender stereotypes, whether they are about the socialisation of children into pink and blue, into different types of

playthings, of recreational activities or into training and work, or notions of which competences should be more valued etc.

The gender binary oppresses us all, but particularly oppresses those for whom it is a daily prison and for whom their/our daily transgression leads to physical and mental violence in the family, in the workplace and on the streets. It also leads to exclusion from services or their provision only on the basis of conformity to rules which negate individual selfhood.

A partial history

Gender identities outside the binary have always existed. Gender identities don't necessarily have a relationship to sexuality. But the construction of sexual identities in a more fixed way under capitalism have also had an impact on trans identities. Michelle O'Brien explains it like this in *Abolish The Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development*: 'In the prostitution and sexual subcultures of the industrializing city, people seized on new forms of gender transgression. A lexicon of cross-dressing emerged, as alongside cis sex workers other new transfeminine gender deviants walked the streets of London, Amsterdam and Paris: Mollies, Mary-Anns, he-she ladies, queens. They sold sex to the bourgeoisie on the streets, ran from police, fought in riots, held regular drag balls, and worked in one of the estimated two thousand brothels specializing in male-assigned sex workers scattered across London'. Similar points have been made, perhaps in less detail, by many others.

There is a complex relationship between early theories of gay and lesbian identities and trans identities in some early theories eg those of Ulrichs a very influential German writer and activist in the 1860s who described gay men as being of a third sex – 'Uranian' (derived from Plato's ancient discussion of that possible third category of being). Ulrichs' theories

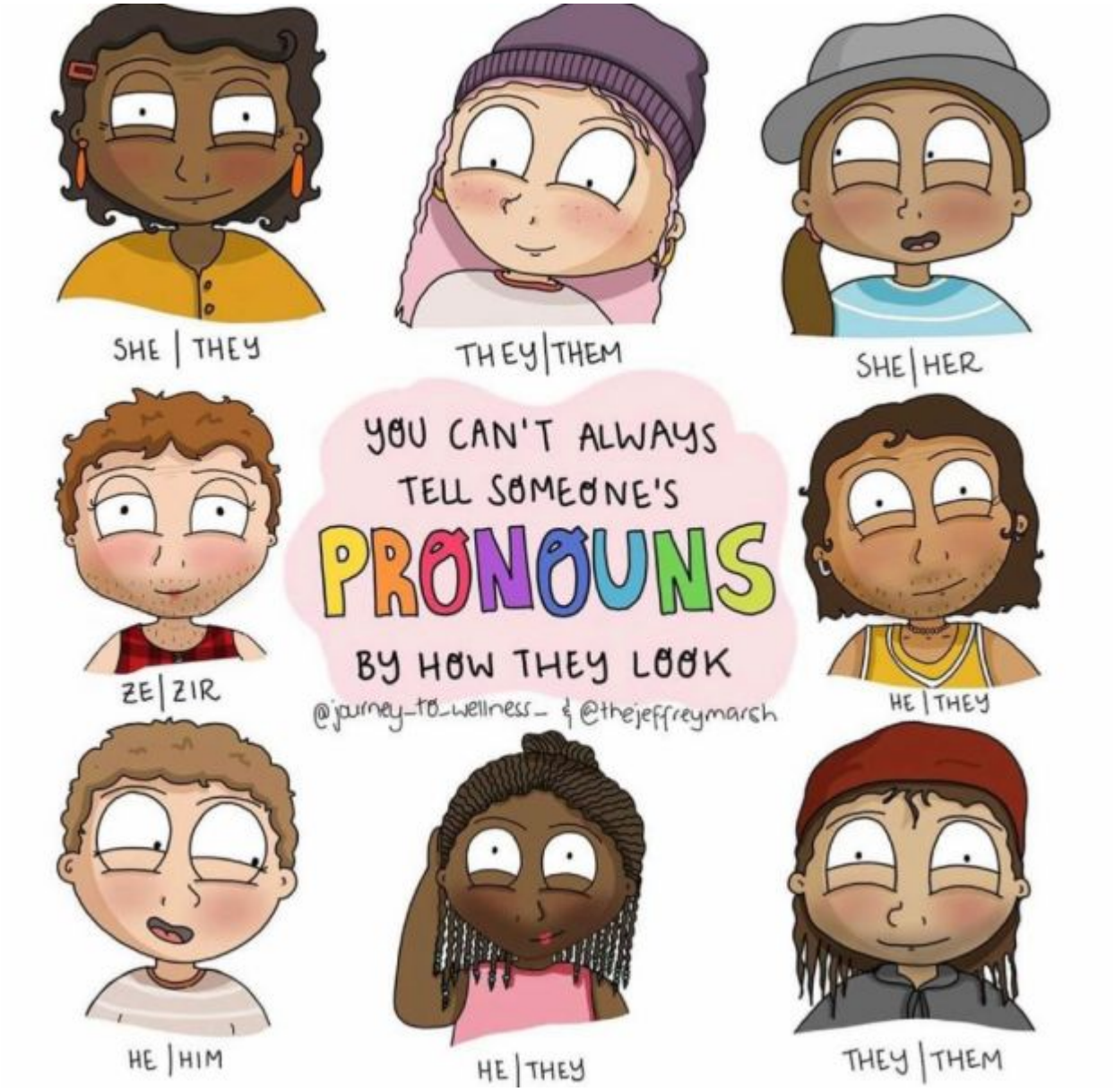
influenced Magnus Hirschfield who in 1897 founded the groundbreaking Scientific-Humanitarian Committee which campaigned for the decriminalisation of homosexuality (and won only partial support from the German Socialist Party before the Nazis took control).

These ideas had international impact, for example on English utopian socialist Edward Carpenter (1844 – 1929), who himself was a collaborator with the early socialist William Morris. And while these theories focused more on gay men, Radclyffe Hall's (1929) novel *The Well of Loneliness* also poses things in a similar framework.

The earliest recorded example of gender reassignment surgery is 1917. This kind of surgery became more frequent in the 1970s – with Jan Morris as a prominent example – but was hugely expensive and still pathologised. The Greek model, especially amongst men, i.e. the idea that young men were always passive and effeminate, was playing out in parts of the commercial gay scene as late as the 1970s in Britain.

O'Brien talks of the particular position of trans women of colour: 'Among queers in major US cities from the late 1950s on, trans women of color were the most starkly visible, leaving them the most vulnerable to street harassment and violence. They served as the consistent foil representing deviant queerness for police, mainstreaming gays, and gender radicals alike. Trans women of color were almost entirely excluded from formal wage labor, instead surviving through streetbased sex work and crime. These trans women of color likely numbered in the low hundreds in many American major cities, but acted as the central figures in a broader underworld of thousands of motley lumpenproletarian queers, including other non-passing gender deviants, homeless queer people, queer drug addicts, sex workers, and gay criminals'. While her account is based on the US it has much in common with developments in Britain and other advanced capitalist countries.

It is important to point out that while there have often, perhaps always, been a trans presence in the LGBTIQ movement, this has been differently described, and there are significant complexities about the relationship between concepts of gender and issues of sexuality. Both trans and other voices from the LGBT movement have pointed out that many of the tropes directed against the LGBT movement as a whole are now directed primarily against trans people particularly in terms of the denial of the rights of young people.



Assessing trans oppression

Let us begin here by taking seriously key trans stats around

mental health for trans people. Although this data is couched in terms of the mental health outcomes actually it contains information about how the actions of others are responsible for very negative impacts on trans lives.

- More than four in five (83 per cent) trans young people have experienced name-calling or verbal abuse, three in five (60 per cent) have experienced threats and intimidation and more than a third (35 per cent) of trans young people have experienced physical assault. (Youth Chances 2014, sample size – 956)
- More than one in four (27 per cent) trans young people have attempted suicide and nine in 10 (89 per cent) have thought about it. 72 per cent have self-harmed at least once. (Youth Chances 2014, sample size – 956)
- Two in five (41 per cent) trans people have been attacked or threatened with violence in the last five years. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- In the last year alone, two thirds (65 per cent) of trans people have been discriminated against or harassed because of being perceived as trans. Over a third (35 per cent) avoid expressing their gender through physical appearance for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- Almost three in four (70 per cent) trans people avoid certain places and situations for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)
- More than half (55 per cent) of trans people have experienced negative comments or behaviour at work because of being trans. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- One in four trans people report having been discriminated against at work. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- More than two in five (44 per cent) trans people have never disclosed to anyone at work that they are trans.

(FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)

- Almost half (48 per cent) of trans people in Britain have attempted suicide at least once and 84 per cent have thought about it. More than half (55 per cent) have been diagnosed with depression at some point. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)
- More than half (54 per cent) of trans people reported that they have been told by their GP that they don't know enough about trans-related care to provide it. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)

We have less information on more precisely what leads to these figures: of how much is violence or coercion to gender conformity within the family, how much discrimination and isolation at work, how much lack of support from health professions, and how much harassment and violence on the streets. UK police statistics show that in 2018 hate crimes against trans people went up 81%.

In her chapter 'Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Gender Freedom' in the 2021 book Transgender Marxism, Michelle O'Brien talks in detail about the way that the rigid gendering of most work settings impacts on the limits the places accessible to trans people within the labour market. She notes that: 'The most systematic report on trans Americans available comes from a 2011 survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, including 6500 respondents… The data on employment was dire: 28% of African-American trans respondents report being unemployed, and 12% of white trans people, compared to 7% of the general population; 15% of all trans respondents were living in extreme poverty, with incomes below $10,000 a year, four times the rate for the general population… 44% of African-American trans women reported experiences in sex work, and 28% of Latinx trans people'. (p.50)

The recent context in Britain

The debate in Britain, particularly the debate on the left, has been sharper for longer than anywhere else. The conflicts probably became sharper here because there was a push from trans organisations and individuals to reform the Gender Recognition Act. When the Act was passed in 2004 it was a step forward from what existed before though it was less radical than what was being debated and in some cases passed elsewhere. (see: https://ilga.org/trans-legal-mapping-report)

Under the GRA, people have to prove to a doctor that they were living full time as 'the other' gender for years before they could access a gender recognition certificate (GRC) – and without a GRC all sorts of protections under the act are not there. The act was absolutely based on a (lack of) understanding that there was a single trans path determined by a medical and psychological model very similar to the debates around the 1967 sexual offences act for gay men.

In fact not all trans people want gender reassignment surgery. New terms were being created and increasingly used eg the notion of 'genderqueer' in the 1990s and, increasingly now, 'nonbinary'. According to official statistics, the proportion of the UK population who define as non-binary when given a choice between male, female and another option is 0.4%, which is 1 in 250 people (Titman, 2014). Around a quarter to a third of trans people identify in some way outside the gender binary: – see: *https://www.allabouttrans.org.uk/about/resources/*

Trans organisations and inclusive LGBTIQ organisations were growing in this period and many more trans people were arguing that the path of the GRA was humiliating, demeaning and determined by the gender binary.

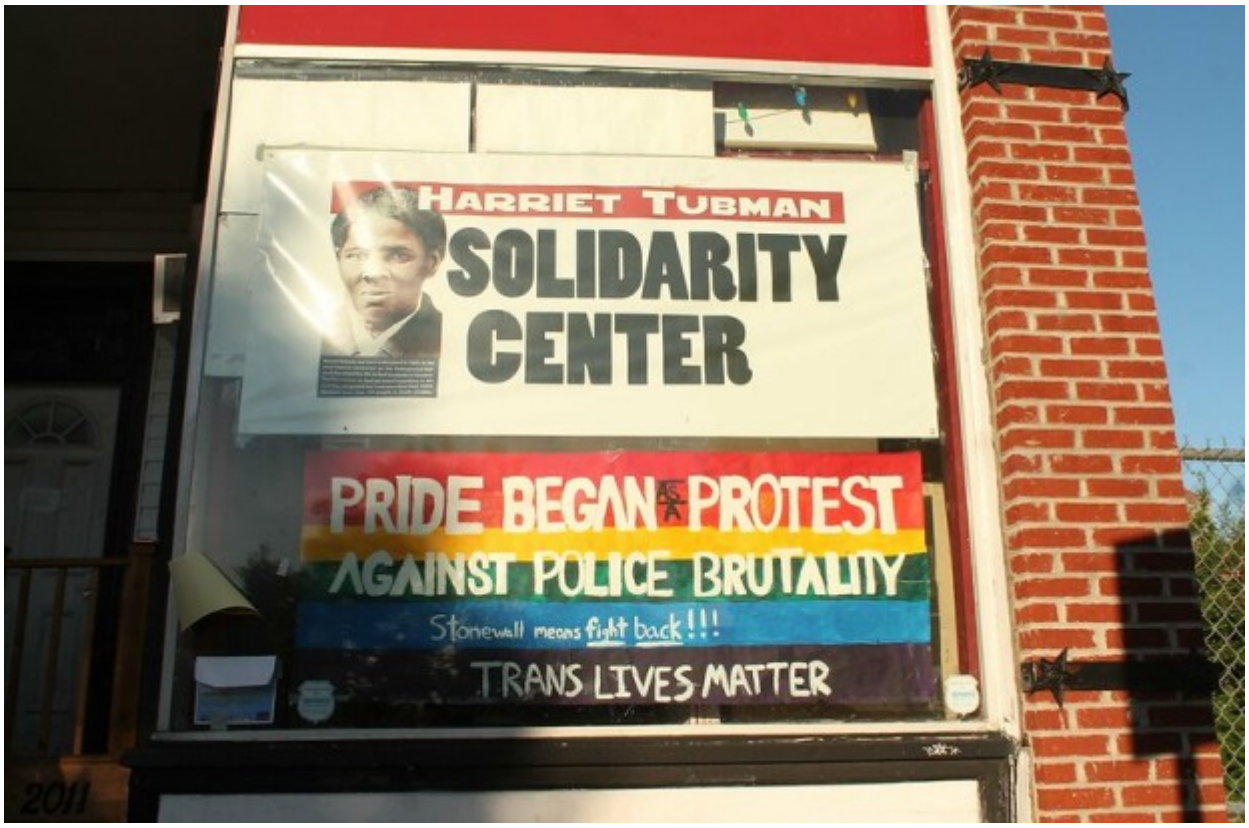
By the 2000s, there were far more vocal trans people speaking about the humiliating way that, for example, access to

hormones was dependent on their convincing a doctor that they subscribed to traditional i.e. reactionary views of men and women's roles (even when they did not really subscribe to them at all, but had to pretend they did). There was also increasing knowledge of some of the work cited above in the scientific world that shows that a gender binary not only not universal but rare. There was also increasing work about the extent to which trans identities are embedded in many different cultures in the global south in Africa and Asia in particular.

Of course, there are trans people who do hold a stereotypical view of the gender binary and of male and female roles (as there are cis people who do) – but the voices of those who don't were becoming louder and arguing that the GRA should be amended to support self id – i.e. the right of trans people to define their gender identity in the same way that people define their sexuality.

As Jules Gleeson points out here, the proposed reform of the GRA still offers virtually nothing to the even less highlighted position of intersex people. But discussions about changes in the law that would improve the lives of many trans people were used, consciously or not, by forces who wanted to prevent this happening.

Their ability to gain exposure for their reactionary views was enhanced by the weakness of socialist feminist thinking and organising in Britain at the time. It's instructive for example to contrast the powerful response of Irish feminists to an attempt to export such backward notions there. It was also and continues to be enhanced by a heavy bias in their favour in key media outlets – most notably the Guardian and Radio 4s Woman's Hour. And of course the Morning Star has played a particularly pernicious role in stoking up hatred towards trans.



Gaslighting

This was the context in which Womans Place UK was set up in September 2017 as they themselves put it: 'to ensure women's voices would be heard in the consultation on proposals to change the Gender Recognition Act i.e. from the beginning denying that trans women are women. They organise/d around 5 demands – which again are premised on that exclusionary principle. While their focus is debating with women, they also have a not insignificant and loyal following amongst men on the left.

The LGB alliance came later but takes a similar approach though its focus is to argue for a movement based only on sexuality- denying the actual history of queer movements.

They both focus on trans women in public speech – trans men are generally ignored, although can sometimes be subject to particularly vile abuse as 'traitors'. They claim to support trans rights and take great exception to being told that any of their demands, writings or speeches are transphobic – but in practice they don't support any of the demands trans people

make – of which self id is clearly the pivotal one.

Much of their rhetoric focuses on body parts in an almost scatological way – particularly impactful in a culture which is generally uncomfortable with bodies.

Parts of their rhetoric instrumentalise women who have experienced violence including sexual violence. Not only do they assume that all of us are cis but that all of us agree with them.

Their focus on toilets is particularly extraordinary. Many people's privacy and indeed health is far more impacted by the lack of accessible and free public toilets than by anyone you might meet there. There is nothing to stop someone who wanted to physically and/or sexually attack women – including trans women – from entering a toilet block to do that – especially when they are badly lit and rarely staffed. The attacks on the rights of young trans people are deeply reminiscent of attacks on LGB people from previous eras.

The misuse of the term 'no platform' has become a favourite trope for these groups who make a huge amount of noise, get a massive amount of media exposure to claim they have been silenced! We need to keep in mind that there is a legitimate, nay necessary debate about when an actual tactic of no platform should be use ie to physically prevent an event taking place by the mass mobilisation of the labour movement. Such should in my view be reserved for fascists – though it does have important analogies with effective picketing. This is an important discussion not least because the National Union of Students has taken a much broader position on when to take a No platform position. But that is different from politically choosing who to invite as speakers to trade union, LP or campaign meetings etc.

In general these organisations and their primary advocates use bad faith arguments which are based on bad/non-existent

science and denial of diversity of contemporary and historical human culture

More recently this has also been an increasingly polarising topic of conversation including within Plaid Cymru, the SNP, around the formation of Alba and within the Scottish Greens.

Our position

The practice of the Fourth International is trans inclusive (most evidently and over a long period of time through our youth camp), that is, **trans women are welcomed in our women's spaces**, and our most recent resolution on the women's movement is clearly trans inclusive.

This does not at all mean that we retreat from our position that the autonomous women's movement is a necessary strategic subject in the class struggle. That would mean for example that we are not in favour of erasing the mention of women, for example, from discussion of pre-natal care but of being inclusive.

The founding conference of ACR (Anti Capitalist Resistance [1]) overwhelmingly agreed a constitution which talks about 'trans people currently experiencing the sharp end of a backlash against their right to existand to unconditionally self-define their genders' and explicitly mentions transphobia as one of the things that the organisation opposes. This was strongly supported by the then 'Women's caucus' which subsequently agreed unanimously to rebadge itself as a 'Women's and non-binary caucus'.

There are moves to set up an LGBT caucus within the ACR which will include at least one comrade who identifies as nonbinary. We support these developments. Our activity in ACR is in line with a trans-inclusive position, and we will argue for that as we build that organisation.

Notes

[1] Anti Capitalist Resistance is a new revolutionary marxist organisation in England and Wales within which supporters of Socialist Resistance, British Section of the Fourth International, are active.

Reading list

Left resources

https://www.vice.com/en/article/9k7mzv/intersex-experience-gender-recognition-act-reforms Jules Gleeson

https://newsocialist.org.uk/whats-debate/ Jules Gleeson

https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/notes-on-british-transphobia Rowan Fortune

https://redfightback.org/read/transphobia_in_the_left

To Abolish The Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development. *Endnotes* 5.. *Michelle O'Brien*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pIj9KTxKsg Transgender Marxism book launch as part of Red May

https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745341668/transgender-marxism/
https://www.rs21.org.uk/2020/07/21/i-was-born-a-baby-not-a-boy-sex-gender-and-trans-liberation-2/?fbclid=IwAR0s7T53-GOqbuDBb2E1oXdj7Xif0lYdtL-FcktJahDN3qm7hFFjv167KV8

https://www.socialistparty.org.uk/keyword/LGBT_Pride/Trans/30302/19-02-2020/labour-party-and-trans-rights

https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/49506/The+fight+for+trans+rights

https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/49414/Socialist+Workers+Party+conference+debates+where+next+for+the+left

https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/intersectionality-and-marxism

Far right and trans people

https://qz.com/807743/conservatives-have-created-a-fake-ideology-to-combat-the-global-movement-for-lgbti-rights/

https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/23/christian-right-tips-fight-transgender-rights-separate-t-lgb

https://www.thedailybeast.com/southern-baptist-convention-trans-people-dont-exist

Wider resources

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd20hNQWKrw Dr Adrian Harrop on puberty blockers

https://www.allabouttrans.org.uk/about/resources/

https://www.nyctransoralhistory.org/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TERF

http://bit.ly/SDtrans
https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/03/26/puberty-blockers-keira-bell-high-court-parent-consent-tavistock-portman-nhs-good-law-project/?fbclid=IwAR1OMCHWl2S826GufEm01yJIB4bO5S2IpTb6n-oYLidKVAaysSnxMxYyz0s
https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/03/27/adventures-in-time-and-gender-lgbt-trans-history-krishna-istha/?fbclid=IwAR1eWhVum49-isCjIaUA8CmTmD245cZ6hzJM0F4DSVQmyk1bcK4igTznQfU

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/truth-about-trans

https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies and https://www.glaad.org/transgender/transfaq

https://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/09/transgender-people-equal-rights-self-identification-gender-recognition-act

https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/the-latest-form-of-transphobia-saying-lesbians-are-going-extinct/2021/03/18/072a95fc-8786-11eb-82bc-e58213caa38e_story.html https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/01/15/a-lost-piece-of-trans-history/

In Honour of International Women's Day

Susan Pashkoff discusses the origins of International Women's Day. This article was originally published by International Viewpoint.

The purpose of this piece to highlight the first wave of feminism and to provide some historical context to the creation of International Working Women's Day in the the period of the first and second decades of the 20th century. While International Women's Day is still celebrated around the world, it is only recently that its socialist roots are being reinvigorated due to a new wave of women's strikes and struggles over violence against women, the struggle for reproductive justice and women's bodily autonomy and the issues surrounding both the economic exploitation of women and the specific conjunction of oppressions that women face daily

due to racism, disablism, sexism (and misogyny) and class.

One would think that in this day and age the struggle over women's reproductive rights would have stopped being a struggle; alas that is not true. While both Ireland and North Ireland now allow for legal (and hence safe) abortion, that is not the case throughout Europe as abortion is illegal in Malta, Andorra, Vatican City, San Marino and Lichtenstein. In Latin America, abortion is legal in Uruguay, Cuba, Guyana and now Argentina. Many countries around the world still ban abortion, some only allow it if the mother's life or physical or mental health is endangered by the pregnancy.

The victory in Argentina for the right to abortion was a hard fought struggle over more than a decade and the struggle itself was part of a broader struggle for women's rights across many issues such as violence against women, femicide, LGBT+ struggles, and women workers' rights.

Understanding and celebrating both the victories and bitter losses in the history of our struggles can provide not only pride at what was done, but also clarification of how to move forward the struggles for the elimination of racism, sexism and misogyny and economic exploitation that had divided and oppressed the vast majority of people living on this planet.

As Terry Conway states in "Solidarity Across Continents for Women's Reproductive Justice"

> *The National Campaign for Safe and Free Legal Abortion (Campaña Nacional por el Aborto Legal Seguro y Gratuito) was set up in 2005 to campaign on these issues and has seeded a whole number of supporting groups. The network of teachers for the right to abortion (Red de Docentes por el Derecho al Aborto -RDDA) campaign for every child to have access to comprehensive sex education while the Network of Health Professionals for the Right to Decide (Red de Profesionales de la Salud por el Derecho a Decidir) argue that access to*

> *legal abortion is a matter of public health. Perhaps the most important network is the socorristas, feminist 'lifeguards' who provided practical and emotional support to women needing abortions. And the campaign itself is the child of a wider feminist movement – a Green Tide as it is known – of which Ni Una Menos (Not One Less)- the movement against femicide- is by far the best known outside the country.*

The bill which passed in the Argentine upper house on the 29th of December 2020 legalised abortion until the 14th week of pregnancy. The first Argentine President to support the legalisation of abortion, President Alberto Fernandez introduced the bill to the Congress in November 2020. On Friday morning, 10th of December 2020, the bill passed the Lower House by a vote of 131-117.

Martina Rodriguez ends her article "The Green Tide in Argentina Fighting for Abortion Rights" by saying:

> *Countries in Latin America are fighting for reproductive rights and feminist movements have their own agency (so ditch the white saviour complex, please). Nevertheless, the demand must be as an international force. We need to put on pressure, not only in our countries where there's a lack of substantial rights, but we must also defend them in every corner of the world and ensure that the laws meet our demands and are implemented justly. After all, it really is about our autonomies, our sexual freedom and our rights to choose something other than the destiny they want to box us in as human vessels. We won't stop until we have the law and a cultural change. It will be legal #SeraLey.*

The History of International Women's Day

International Women's Day (8 March, IWD) was originally called International Working Women's Day. It was a socialist holiday established in 1911 by the Socialist International and is

celebrated by women's groups around the world. In many countries, it is a national holiday and has recently been officially recognized by the United Nations. However, up until the 1970's, with the advent of a new women's movement, the radical working class roots of IWD had been practically forgotten. Due to its socialist leaning, it was excised from the United States memory, much as Labor Day replaced May Day, except in small immigrant enclaves or radical union groups. In Europe and the rest of the world, it continued to be widely celebrated, but tended to honour women in name only, mostly with flowers or by simply putting a woman's face on a male agenda. IWD, in fact, was the culmination of a century of women working in the labour, feminist, socialist, and anti-slavery and segregation movements to bring together the common interests of the working class and women's rights advocates.

There were several major trends that led to the establishment of IWD:

The first was a revolutionary fervour in Europe and the United States toward socialism, democratization and the vote. In Europe it was exemplified by a movement for working class men without property seeking the vote to further a socialist government, paralleled by a movement for middle class women to get the vote. This situation was mirrored in the United States by the struggle to gain the vote for black men and white women. The contradictions between these two types of suffrage movements were evident (should we fight for the non-propertied or black men to get the vote, even if women were excluded?). The solution, of course, was to get the vote for both groups.

Clara Zetkin was among the early socialists to see working class women as the driving force towards universal suffrage (everyone gets the vote independent of property qualifications to which it had been historically tied) since they bridged the divide, yet retain the principle of a revolutionary socialist agenda. It was Clara Zetkin who advocated for the merging of the working class socialist movement and the women's movement

through the establishment of International Women's Day as a way to forward the goals of both labour and women. Zetkin opposed the stagist approach by the mainstream Women's Movement in Britain which advocated first getting women over a certain age with property the vote (the centenary of the Representation of the People Act of 1918 which gave all British men over 21 the vote and women of property and over 30 getting the vote in Britain) and then later that women without property be granted suffrage. It took another decade, 1928, for women without property to gain the franchise.

In 1906, Zetkin addresses why socialists should support Women's suffrage and Universal suffrage:

> *We must always press on the question of Woman Suffrage when we are agitating about the Suffrage. We have always argued in the Suffrage agitation that it was a question of equal rights for men and women, and we must continue to do so till we succeed. We must be united. We know that we shall not attain the victory of Woman Suffrage in a short time, but we know; too, that in our struggles for this measure we shall revolutionise hundreds of thousands of minds. We carry on our war, not as a fight between the sexes, but as a battle against the political might of the possessing classes; as a fight which we carry on with all our might and main, without hatred of the other sex; a fight whose final aim and whose glory will be that in the broadest masses of the proletariat the knowledge shall arise that when the day of the historical development shall have made sufficient progress then the proletariat, in its entirety, without distinction of sex, shall be able to call out to the capitalist order of society: "You rest on us, you oppress us, and, see, now the building which you have erected is tottering to the ground (Social Democracy and Women's Suffrage, 1906).*

The first clear victory in which the leadership of working class women following the establishment of IWD was the

organization of the textile workers and women's suffrage in the United States and the second victory was Russian Revolution in 1917 which began with a massive strike by women textile workers in Petrograde (St. Petersburg) on International Women's Day. This strike was called against the orders of the Unions and left-wing political parties. The strikes lit the match of a country on the verge; they doubled in size to 200,000 workers and over the next few days, 66,000 men of the local army garrison joined forces with the strikers. The February Russian revolution began and the Tsar was forced to abdicate.

The second important factor was the increased numbers of women in the labour movement, particularly in the textile industry, as more and more women were pulled into factories and out of homes with the rise of industrial capitalism. Their struggle to free themselves from the patriarchal home and obtain decent work conditions in the marketplace instead of being viewed as cheap labour is exemplified in the call for both "bread and roses." The textile strikes beginning in 1857 and the massive strikes between 1908 and 1915 were the activist expression of women's struggle for power. This was especially true after the horror of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory strike where mostly women workers, but also children and a few men were killed in a horrific sweatshop fire soon after a strike of textile workers (The Uprising of the 20,000) in New York city demanding trade union recognition, better wages, working conditions and health and safety measures.

While initially the feminist movement focused on human rights issues for women such as suffrage, many of the women felt allied to working class struggles for decent wages and rights and took up the call that freedom and equality for one group meant freedom and equality for all. While the anti-slavery movement seems distinct, the end of slavery pushed all workers, black and white into the same labour struggle as wage labourers. Once this occurred, it was up to anti-racist groups

to fight for equality within the labour movement. This, of course, always raised the question of equality for the other major group excluded from equality in the labour force – women.

These movements, occurring in a short period between the end of the civil war and the end of WW1, provided the activist and theoretical base to try to unite diverse groups into the revolutionary struggle. The formation of IWD was an explicit effort to unite the interests and theories of women and male labour (including workers of colour that was implied in the socialist agenda) under a Revolutionary Socialist agenda in support of universal suffrage and economic equality. The following excerpts (which we hope you will read, view, sing-along- with, explore and enjoy) are just a sampling of some of the actions and words of some prominent working women and movements.

We need to go back to the rise of the post-Civil War labour movement and the first wave of feminism to see the inevitable class contradictions that arose between women of the bourgeoisie and women of the working class. The differences in approach are obvious when we look at the issues. Bourgeois women advocating women's suffrage linked it to property qualifications and argued that women as a group should be enfranchised without looking at how this left blacks and many non-propertied workers without the vote. The birth control movement also wound up linking to eugenics groups that were aligned to repugnant issues targeting the poor, the disabled and people of colour.

To win equality for all people, women of the left argued that the economic and social exploitation endemic to the capitalist system be eliminated by the triumph of socialism. While suffrage and access to birth control were clearly important reform issues, they would not in and of itself enable all women's, or for that matter, all people's equality. However when reformist men chose to limit their call for the vote to

blacks and non-propertied working men – forgetting that this still excluded women – the dynamics shifted and the call for socialists to specifically include women in their demand for the vote was born.

This is an extract from an article on the ***Daily Kos*** *"ACM: In Honour of International Women's Day – In the Words of our Founding Mothers". The authors said: "What we decided we wanted to do was to allow women to speak for themselves, so we reproduced some quotes from these women. We wanted to discuss not only women that were known as leaders or that were heralded during their times; we also want to remind people of the voices of those who fought on the shop-floors, those that became "leaders" due to circumstance. Their actions and speeches inspired and moved others and they are still relevant." For those quotes please go to the original article.*