Outrage as UK Tories attack Trans Rights and Scottish Devolution

Across the British state, *writes Mike Picken*, there is a growing opposition to the Conservative UK government's unprecedented blocking of a Scottish Parliament legislative Bill on transgender rights passed last month – the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill.

After weeks of misleading propaganda about what the Bill says and its implications for UK wide legislation, on 17 January the Tory government at Westminster announced they were going for the so-called 'nuclear' option of blocking the Bill using a 'section 35 order'.

The 'section 35' mechanism is part of the 1998 legislation that created the Scottish Parliament and was only ever intended to be used as a last resort, if there was a grave threat of the Scottish Parliament trampling over other rights across the UK. During the passage of the 1998 legislation it was dubbed the 'Governor-General' clause, a reference to the British Empire's colonial controllers, as it gives total discretion to a government minister to overrule democratic decisions. It has never been used before now and the legal basis presented by the UK government has been widely described as completely flimsy.

'Section 35' is being used to overturn the Scottish Bill as a political move by a reactionary government against progressive legislation, not because of an infringement of rights.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) government, based in the devolved Scottish Parliament have vigorously opposed the Tories' move to overturn law, rightly describing it as an 'outrage' and a flagrant abuse of the rights of trans people

in order to promote the Tory ‘culture wars’ as well as to attack the current devolution arrangements.

The SNP are strongly supported in this by the Scottish Green Party, who have been championing trans rights and who made a cooperation agreement in 2021 with the SNP explicitly to support the Scottish government moves to introduce this new legislation. Between them these parties have won around half the Scottish electorate in elections in recent years, while the Tories have slumped with polls showing them currently at around 15%.

Labour leadership equivocates while Labour members protest

The official Labour Party opposition in the UK Westminster parliament, led by Keir Starmer, has been appalling and tacitly gives succour to the Tories’ move to block the legislation. This is despite Labour party members in Scotland and across the UK also supporting and championing the legislation and despite Labour’s historic support for devolution to Scotland. Starmer made reactionary statements in a BBC TV interview on 15 January against the Bill’s extension of support for trans self-ID to 16 and 17 year olds that have been condemned by leading figures within the Scottish Party.

Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) who voted for the legislation and, so far, a Labour party constituency organisation in Edinburgh have challenged Starmer’s equivocal position and defended both trans rights and the democratic rights of the Scottish Parliament.



Edinburgh Central CLP

Notes the Westminster government's decision to block the passage of the Scottish Parliament's Gender Recognition Reform Act using S35 of the Scotland Act.

Believes Scottish Labour should oppose this move, regardless of the position of the party at UK level, both as the party of devolution and as one of the parties that voted for the Act.

Calls on the Scottish Executive Committee and the Labour Group at Holyrood to oppose the blocking of this law, both publicly and within the UK party.

In the UK Westminster Parliament, Labour are the 'Official Opposition', but their solitary Scottish Labour MP there and the rest of Labour's Front Bench leadership **abstained** in the parliamentary vote on the section 35 Order.

But in the devolved Welsh government the Labour Party's First Minister, Mark Drakeford, the only elected leader of a Labour government in any part the UK union state, had welcomed the Scottish legislation and said he wanted the Welsh parliament, Senedd Cymru, to have similar powers to Scotland and to enact the same legislation. Drakeford went further in opposing the overturning of the Scottish Parliament Bill saying that the Welsh Government might back the Scottish Government in court.

Other Labour members across the UK have condemned the Tory attack on the LGBTQ+ community in Britain, with prominent journalist and writer Owen Jones calling Labour 'absolutely pathetic'.



Several Labour Members of the Westminster Parliament (MPs) also protested in the chamber at the Tories' attack on trans

rights and Scottish democracy. But only 11 Labour MPs had enough principles to defy the leadership and vote against the section 35 Order, while the vast majority including the entire UK leadership abstained. However, Westminster MPs of the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Alliance Party and SDLP in Ireland indicated their strong support for the Scottish Parliament's legislation and voted against the attempt to overturn it.

In wider society, particularly in Scotland, there has been strong opposition. Fifteen prominent and significant organisations supporting women's rights in Scotland issued a joint statement opposing the blocking of the Bill by the Tories.

Part of a global development in trans rights – rejected by UK Tories

Across Europe and the rest of the world, other parliaments have introduced similar processes of 'self-ID' for trans people to that legislated in Scotland, including the 26-county Irish state and more recently the Spanish state. The World Health Organisation and the United Nations have welcomed moves in states to remove medical processes and support self-ID. These processes of gender self-ID by other states were previously recognised by the UK government, but as part of their rapid shift to the right the Tories have not only vetoed the Bill in Scotland but are also threatening to withdraw recognition of international systems of trans self-ID.

This is a significant component of the increasingly toxic direction of the Tory Party advocacy of 'culture wars' against progressive social policies that has followed in the aftermath of the Brexit process. It is a direction that is also being followed by the leadership of the UK Labour Party.

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill would advance trans rights

The Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill was passed by the devolved Scottish Parliament, following six long years of debate, on 22 December 2022 by a two thirds majority of 86 to 39 votes. The Bill simplifies the process whereby a trans person living or born in Scotland could obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) to change their gender on official documentation. It would change the process to a system of self-identification for living in their new identity for three months, rather than the current complex process of medical diagnosis of mental ill health and the need to live in a new gender for two years. The legislation would also apply to 16 and 17 year olds enabling them to obtain a GRC for the first time, with some slightly different procedures and safeguards to those of adults. Under Scottish devolved law 16 and 17 year olds already have the right to vote in local and Scottish elections and have long had the right to marry or enter civil partnership without parental approval (none of which apply in Tory-run England). This enabling of rights of young people in Scotland is also part of the divergence between mainstream Scottish opinion and the Tory 'culture wars' against.

Gender recognition processes have been designated in Scotland as part of a devolved system of civil registration. Part of the Tory argument is that Scotland should not have separate systems. But as the SNP rightly point out Scotland has always had a different legal system and different laws over, for example, marriage/civil partnership and divorce.

In the 2021 Scottish Parliament election, the manifestos of the SNP and in fact all the parties elected, including Scottish Labour, committed to introducing new legislation for gender self-ID and for the SNP this has been an issue first promised over six years . The SNP did not quite win a majority in Parliament under the system of Proportional Representation used in Scotland, but together with the Greens they have formed a stable majority government that introduced the Bill.

The Bill went through extensive discussion and the largest public consultation process ever held by the Scottish Parliament and was supported by the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

Right wing groups opposed to the Bill, fictitiously claimed that it would weaken women's rights and particularly alleged that it would be used by violent men to attack women. The Scottish government led by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon vigorously rejected these arguments, arguing that the Bill would assist trans people in Scotland to live more easily under their new gender, removing the delays and stigma associated with a medical diagnosis of mental illness ('gender dysphoria'). The consultation indicated strong and informed support for the Bill across civil society, including the medical professions, though there was a vocal minority of traditionalists opposed.

A tiny minority of SNP MSPs (and MPs) opposed the legislation, with one minister resigning and several others voting against. But the vast majority of the SNP supported the legislation. Unfortunately, the Alba Party, a pro-independence minor split from the SNP led by former SNP leader Alex Salmond and a party outside the Scottish Parliament, also spoke and campaigned against the Bill destroying any credibility it had as a progressive organisation and becoming a repository for transphobic elements.

Scottish Greens in trans solidarity

The passage of the legislative Bill received fulsome support from the SNP's government partner the left wing Scottish Green Party, whose spokesperson on Equalities, ecosocialist Maggie Chapman MSP, put forward an exemplary and passionate solidarity with the trans and wider LGBTQ+ community. (The Scottish Green Party should not be confused with the Green Party in England and Wales, a totally separate party with whom the Scottish Greens have broken off links due to their failure

to tackle transphobia). They have also built strong links with the trans community campaigning for their rights – leading prominent trans women in Scotland include Ellie Gomersall, the President of National Union of Students Scotland, the leader of Rainbow Greens – the Green LGBTQI movement – Beth Douglas, and Glasgow's first trans councillor Elaine Gallagher, all of whom are Scottish Green Party members and have been highly visible in the public defence of trans rights.

The only party in the Scottish Parliament opposed to the principle of the legislation was the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (the Tories in Scotland), but even then two MSPs from that party still voted for the legislation, one of whom is the Health spokesperson and a medical doctor whose own professional body and trade union, the British Medical Association, also support self-ID and the legislation.

All four Liberal Democrat MSPs supported the Bill, as did 18 of the 22 Labour MSPs. Liberal Democrat UK MPs at Westminster also indicated their strong unanimous support for the Bill and opposition to the Tory veto – the complete opposite of UK Labour.

The Bill was carefully worded during its passage through the Scottish Parliament to ensure it complies with UK law and in particular the Equality Act 2010. An amendment from a Labour MSP was supported by the SNP, Greens and Liberal Democrats to make explicit that the legislation did not affect the UK wide remit of the Equality Act. But the Tories repeatedly attempted to put forward wrecking amendments that would clearly violate UK law, such as dealing with matters 'reserved' for the Westminster parliament such as prisoners and refugees.

The Bill was eventually passed overwhelmingly by two thirds of MSPs and there were celebrations outside the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh by trans people and their supporters.

Tory 'culture wars' and attack on unions

The Tories are developing a right wing agenda from the Donald Trump playbook over economic and social issues. In the vacuum that has opened up in the Party following the governmental collapse of Boris Johnson's premiership and then the short lived and disastrous Liz Truss period, Rishi Sunak claims to be attempting to 'steady the ship'. But the Tories are facing disastrous poll ratings and a massive strike wave of over a million workers fighting against deteriorating wages in a cost-of-living crisis. School and university teachers, health workers and the biggest nurses' union, civil servants, and other groups of workers are all following in the aftermath of rail worker strikes – a strike movement beginning to focus on the 1st February as a coordinated day of action. So the Tories have decided to launch a full scale onslaught on workers' rights in bringing in even more draconian anti trade union laws.

And now the Tories have chosen to also launch an attack on trans rights and devolution, taking on the Scottish Parliament and the SNP government by overturning devolved legislation.

Movement needed

The Tories could not choose the timing of their attack on the Scottish Parliament Gender Recognition Reform Bill and may have underestimated the degree of opposition they will face.

Although the Tories expectedly won their recent case at the UK Supreme Court against the Scottish Parliament's right to call a new Scottish independence referendum, the legal grounds on which they are overturning the Scottish Parliament Bill are a different matter and subject to a 'reasonableness' yardstick. The Scottish government have already announced they will launch a legal challenge starting with a judicial review in the Scottish courts, but then expected to be resolved in the UK Supreme Court. There is a general view that one of the reasons that the Tories have chosen the Section 35 route is because it drags the issue out in the courts for many months

longer than other routes available to them (and will cost the Scottish government more). The Scottish government may well succeed in the courts, though this is unlikely to be achieved until at least the autumn of 2023. Opinions among leading lawyers differ on the likelihood of the Tory section 35 order being overturned in the courts – but one of Labour's leading law experts and a former Lord Chancellor and Justice minister, Charlie Falconer, has argued that the Tory move is fatally flawed legally and wrong; while the LGBT+ Labour group have welcomed this opinion, the Labour party's leadership has not supported this view.

However, the legal challenge will be decided by conservative judges. Movement in support of trans rights and to defend devolution cannot rely on a rigged legal system, so there is a need for a massive mobilisations.

The SNP will attempt, justifiably, to use the attack on the Bill as a reason for advocating the end of the union and for Scottish independence. But the SNP are a thoroughly constitutional party, when what is increasingly needed to confront the Tory UK state is mass action. Furthermore, the Labour Party as an institution under the Starmer UK leadership is showing its ineffectiveness as a mobilising force, even bending to the Tory agenda in many respects. UK Labour doesn't support the current strikes and it has refused to oppose the blocking of the Scottish Parliament Bill. Instead Keir Starmer plays to the Tory 'culture wars' agenda by opposing trans rights for under 18s. However, this is bringing the Party leadership increasingly into conflict with the base of the Party, including much of the Scottish Labour Party and its MSPs, and even some of its Westminster MPs who want to stand up for LGBTQ+ rights and devolution. Local organisations of Labour (CLPs/Branches) need to unite with the SNP and Scottish Greens government to defend devolution and trans rights. Labour should be mobilising public opinion to try to build a mass movement to bring down the Tories, but that will be

difficult in an environment that has been dominated by members' tribalist loyalties.

The death agony of the UK state?

Polls indicate a majority of Scottish voters and a significant section of Welsh voters are now questioning their country's membership of a dramatically lopsided and reactionary UK 'union' of nations. The Tories' actions on the Scottish Parliament Bill indicate that only independence can guarantee the democratic rights of Scottish and Welsh people. Labour give little encouragement that they will be much better at UK level, and have faced near collapse in Scotland with their lowest vote share in a century in 2021 due to their opposition to an independence referendum. However in Wales the Party has fared better electorally, by being pluralistic over the issue of independence and forging a governmental alliance with Plaid Cymru.

The Tories botched Brexit has also led to the collapse of devolution to the six counties of Ireland that are part of the UK state. The Tory UK government's concessions to the far right religious 'creationists' of the Democratic Unionist Party over Brexit and other issues is increasingly challenged there and as the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement is approached, the question of Irish reunification is increasingly posed.

The toxic Tories face electoral oblivion but will attempt to hold on as long as possible. A full scale mobilisation of the working class and progressive movements is needed to finish them off.

A statement from Scottish civil society organisations on the UK Government's intervention on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

This week, the UK government announced their intention to block the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which was recently passed overwhelmingly in the Scottish Parliament, from becoming law. We, the undersigned, wish to make clear our strong opposition to this intervention and to any suggestion that these reforms would have an adverse effect on the Equality Act or women's rights.

Too much of the debate around the Bill has been shaped by misinformation on what the bill will actually mean in practice. The majority of human rights, women's and equalities organisations in Scotland have shown clear, consistent and unified support for this legislation throughout its seven years in development.

Years of detailed analysis by expert organisations in Scotland has considered the impact of the Bill in detail. This work has shown that the legislation will significantly improve the experiences of trans people, protecting them from the harms of a stigmatising and unnecessarily difficult process to access legal paperwork, while having no impact on women's services, the operation of the Equality Act, or single sex spaces. These findings have been echoed by the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee's own indepth considerations of the Bill.

Specifically, the Equality Act has allowed for protection from discrimination of trans people on the basis of self-identification since its passage into law in 2010. This was the case before the Gender Recognition Reform Bill and will be the case after. Contrary to arguments made during the passage of the Scottish Bill, this legislation makes no changes to whether and when trans women can access women's spaces. If it is legitimate and proportionate, trans women can already be excluded from single sex services irrespective of whether they have a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) or not.

The legislation will have no impact on the experience or requirements of rape victims in court.

Violence Against Women (VAW) services in Scotland already operate on the basis of self-ID. Individuals are not required to provide their birth certificates to access services, something that would be hugely harmful. Instead, services have robust safeguarding processes that allow for individuals to be excluded where there are legitimate concerns. Rape crisis services in Scotland have been providing trans inclusive services for 15 years without incident.

It is demoralising to see how trusted and highly experienced experts on equality and providers of services to women – many of whom have provided world-leading services in Scotland for decades – have been drowned out in this debate and denigrated for standing against misinformation.

There are currently a number of very real threats to women's rights in Scotland and the UK including but not limited to poverty, the cost of living crisis, cuts to services, rape conviction rates and the experiences of immigrant and refugee women. We find it particularly concerning that so much political and media attention has been devoted to the debate around this Bill in place of tackling these genuine barriers to women's equality.

Trans people across Scotland have endured seven years of being dangerously misrepresented in public discourse. We are deeply concerned about the impact of misinformation around what this Bill actually does, and the perception that it creates that women's rights and the rights of trans people are in conflict. They are not.

Our organisations see the paths to equality for women and trans people as being deeply interconnected and dependent on our shared efforts to dismantle patriarchal systems that impose barriers to full equality for us all.

Signed,

Amnesty International

Close the Gap

Engender

Human Rights Consortium

JustRight Scotland

National Union of Students Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland

Rape Crisis Scotland

Scottish Trades Union Congress

Scottish Refugee Council

Scottish Women's Aid

Scottish Women's Convention

Scottish Women's Rights Centre

Young Women's Movement

Zero Tolerance

Reposted from Rape Crisis Scotland: https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/news/news/a-statement-from-scottish-civil-society-organisations-on-the-uk-governments-intervention-o/
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Being a transgender woman at the International Youth Camp

by Sister from Scotland

In July this year, I attended my first ever International Youth Summer Camp. While I may have been a committed Leninist for a long time, and while I have been a member of the Fourth International's Scottish section for a few years now, unfortunately those years fell amid the COVID-19 pandemic and thus were deprived of camps. So by Summer of this year, I was especially excited to finally attend the camp as part of a delegation made up of comrades from Scotland (along with some dear international friends based in England!). It being my first ever time would have made this camp a special occasion all by itself, but there was another, much more personal reason why I was so excited to be taking part: This was going to be my first time living publicly as a woman.

You see, I am a transgender woman. But so far I have been a very cautious and closeted trans woman. I am really early on in my transition, and until recently the only people I have truly been myself around are fellow trans people from the

queer movement. And even then, I've only presented as a woman in small gatherings of trusted friends and partners. But I decided that this time, at the camp, I was going to take a leap into the unknown: I was going to dress, present, live as the woman I really am, for the duration of the camp. I was going to introduce myself to my comrades.

It is a general point with me, that I do not take leaps into the unknown very often. I am one of those people who are very easily caught and stuck by indecision when it comes to big choices. I am a woman, but a fearful one. I want to show my face: I want to be known and thought of and spoken to and loved as a woman, but I am afraid. I am a woman, but most of the time I am silent and hidden, buried deep in the closet. So what led me to take a leap, for once?

Two things. Firstly, I was impressed by the Fourth International's approach to identity issues. Not just their historical involvement in the feminist movement, but also the ongoing commitment to racial justice, feminism and queer struggle that I could see upheld in the various sections of the international. Of course, historical and programmatic commitments, while inspiring and appealing to a closeted trans woman like me, would not alone have been enough to convince me to bare myself so truthfully and openly.

It was the second thing that was decisive. It might seem small to you, reader, but it was simply getting the chance, a few months before the camp, to meet some members of the Danish section who introduced themselves with they/them pronouns. Here they were, some gender dissidents just like me, clear and queer among their fellow comrades without a worry. It occurred sharply to me, right then and there, that if I was just a little bit braver, I could be like that!

Well, that decided it. With a good deal of panicked, excited sincerity, I told those comrades about myself, I mean really, truly about myself, and told them that I wanted to come out at

the camp. They were supportive and cheerful, and looking forward to knowing the real me when we met again in France. And so, I had now committed myself. I won't lie: It was a decision I would worry and fret about as the camp drew near. This was natural, obviously. I was about to come out to about two hundred people, and across multiple language barriers too! Would I get tangled up in explaining myself? Would there be misunderstandings? Would some people turn out to be bigots? I had reason to be more than a little nervous: A depressing number of times in my years on the left, I have seen how easily some supposedly progressive "comrades" have dropped the act and morphed into reactionary dogs when challenged by actually-existing trans people with ideas and opinions.

However, I was also buoyed by a kind of feverish anticipation. The simple prospect of cutting the bullshit, dropping my boyish disguise and being totally honest seemed so radical, so wonderful, so liberating, that I could not wait to get to France. Besides, I knew full well that to be openly myself at the camp was a political commitment, not just a personal one. I am both a militant in a battle for my own civil rights and a socialist, and I feel it is my duty as a transgender socialist to do my best to bring together the causes of trans rights and socialism into one struggle. I firmly believe that the perspectives of trans people are valuable, and that the socialist movement is lessened by their absence, just as it is lessened by the absence of black perspectives or disabled perspectives. If the patriarchy tries to turn gender into a binary of bitterly opposed frontlines, then gender rebels like me are well positioned to show how these frontlines are vulnerable to permeation, sabotage and mutiny. We cannot be quiet, not when we have so much to give, so much to talk about, so much to teach. And so, I felt compelled to raise my voice: A woman's voice, loud, sharp and liberated.

As the fateful date approached I made some preparations, like telling the other members of the Scottish delegation, and

coming out to a few comrades I had already met. Their support and acceptance was a welcome boost, and it really cemented my resolve and confidence to know that they would have my back during the camp. And when, after the long journey down to the campsite, the time finally came to commit to things and reveal my true self, it was good to be able to take the first steps with some help from comrades. I remember, on the first morning of the camp, speaking with my delegation, airing out some last-minute nerves and making absolutely sure that, in the event of any exclusion or bigotry, I could count on them to help me assert my right to be there as the woman I am.

Thankfully though, all that worrying was completely needless. I got so hung up on potential issues and fears, only for them to dissolve the moment I walked out into the sun in a dress and began introducing myself. I don't think I was prepared for how natural it all felt, as if I had been doing this my entire life. Whether it was a comrade who had previously met me as a "boy", or whether it was someone entirely new, things went so smoothly that I was a little bit shocked. But only a little bit, because the dominant emotion I felt was joy – pure, riotous, joy.

This wonderful feeling would develop into a deep sense of fulfilment as the days passed. Yes, as one of a handful of trans women at the camp, I was in an extreme minority, but it hardly felt that way. On the contrary, the blanket response of my sisters was to welcome and include me, and as I spent time participating in the women's discussion spaces, learning, sharing ideas and helping to plan actions, I came to realise some things: chiefly, that this was the first time I properly felt a part of a women's movement.

I am a feminist. The problem is though, that the feminist movement in Scotland and the UK is in a parlous, disorganised state compared to the women's movement in the rest of the world. Feminism in these gloomy islands can't boast of mass, vibrant, militant women's strikes and demonstrations in the

way that Argentinian or Portuguese or Polish or Chilean feminism can. In addition, the feminist movement here is so riven by culture war junk and middle class transphobia, that it feels pretty difficult for a trans woman like me to feel safe or welcome taking part in what little we have. There is that constant worry with the movement back home, a lingering fear that solidarity is something that can easily be revoked when the sister doesn't fit some arbitrary biological or social norm.

I had no such worries among the women at the camp. Here I experienced live, determined, militant sisterhood, a sisterhood ferocious in combat yet caring and inclusive towards its own, a sisterhood committed to mass revolutionary struggle. And I was welcome implicitly, no questions asked! As I sat in meetings surrounded almost totally by cisgender women, I felt utterly at ease, a circumstance which honestly surprised me. I reflected that, were I in a similar setting in the UK, I would be a lot more nervous and on-edge, the familiar fear gnawing at me and making me wonder whether my inclusion might suddenly be subject to withdrawal on some bigot's whim. But here, among revolutionary socialist women, I was as much a woman as any other, a comrade to be loved and supported.

And this love and support helped me realise something else, too: The sheer difference which living in an honest manner makes to my ability to express emotions. I've long been aware of how enforced masculinity has marked and scarred me in various ways. Throughout childhood, I was conditioned, punished and harassed into acting and thinking like a boy by various forces, whether they be the ways patriarchal society moulds the minds of children to adopt certain gender roles, the way kids learn to laugh at girly "faggots" and "trannies", or the way an overly emotional child is relentlessly bullied for being "soft" and "effeminate", too much of a "crybaby". This prolonged campaign against the personality of the child

induces a painful kind of alienation- Confused and afraid, bombarded by the world around you, the easiest response is just to give in and try and fit the role as well as you can, even if it means doing as the oppressor wants and shutting away parts of yourself. Sure, it might make you less of a target, and you might be convinced that it's better to try and be "normal" and "just like the other boys", but it never, ever, feels right. Even though you can't put your finger on what's wrong and why you feel so at odds with yourself, you simply cannot ignore the pain, no matter how much you scream at yourself to shut up and conform. It's hard to be at peace when you're mutilating yourself.

This is something that you gradually confront as you begin to wake up and process the fact that you've been brainwashed, but you really do not realise the extent to which your identity has been dulled by living a lie until the burden of the lie is gone. It's something I've been approaching as I've shared my womanhood with loved and trusted friends, but the scale, duration and public nature of my doing so at the camp, and in front of so many cis people simultaneously, affected me in ways I hadn't prepared for. It shook me, but in the most wonderful way possible. Living so naturally and freely as a woman was like coming home to myself. Suddenly, I was so much less inhibited and so much more confident in expressing my feelings and emotions. Years of self-censorship and self-scrutiny have led me to mentally check myself in countless ways whenever I'm with other people, but here I didn't need to think about how I acted and expressed myself at all- Everything just flowed naturally.

So here I was, accessing those alienated parts of my personality that had been walled off and hidden by a childhood of having to be a boy. Here I was: A confident, affectionate, goofy, relaxed woman, perfectly at ease among her sisters and comfortable in her own skin. It felt so good to throw all the old defense mechanisms, all the nerves, all the congealed boy

shit- in short, all my chains- right into the trash. How lightly you breathe when you aren't chained down!

This is what made the Youth Camp so special for me. I think it speaks to the way that the Camp functions as a space for a kind of pre-figurative politics, a way of testing out some elements of socialism via collective, co-operative living. The ability to express yourself exactly as you wish to at the Camp, there among your fellow militants, is a miniature of that limitless expression of the human personality that will be the right and freedom of everyone under socialism. I may be back in Scotland now, and I may be remaining quite closeted for the time being, but I nevertheless see the camp as marking an important milestone in my transition. It has inspired me, and given me strength and determination. I have had a sample of full, liberated womanhood, and I want it every day of my life. Yes, the world will not always receive me as enthusiastically as my comrades have done, and yes, the struggle for freedom will be long and difficult, but I also know what's at stake and what's to be won, if only I, we, all of us women dare! And I know that it can only be so through collective, revolutionary sisterhood. We will go forward over the corpse of the patriarchy, arms linked and voices raised as one.

Our bodies, our choice!

Every woman a sister, every sister a revolutionary!

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Sister from Scotland is a Fourth International supporter.

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