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?

Originally published by *Heckle* a Publication of the *Republican Socialist Platform* 13th May 2025

No Going Back! Stand Up For Trans Rights

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.

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/
ORIGINALLY POSTED ON JANUARY 17 2023 AT 16:36

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

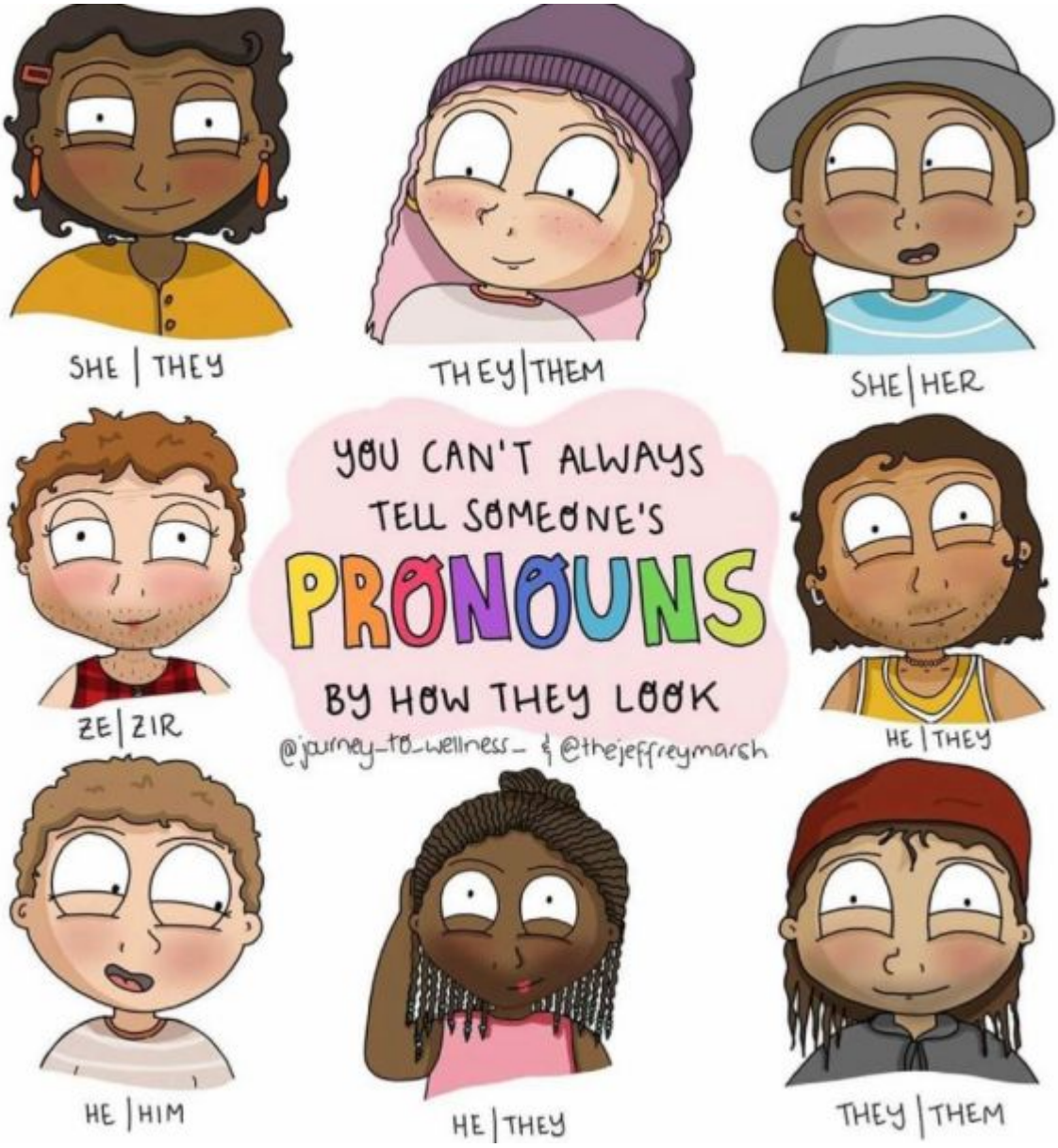
influenced Magnus Hirschfield who in 1897 founded the groundbreaking Scientific-Humanitarian Committee which campaigned for the decriminalisation of homosexuality (and won only partial support from the German Socialist Party before the Nazis took control).

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.

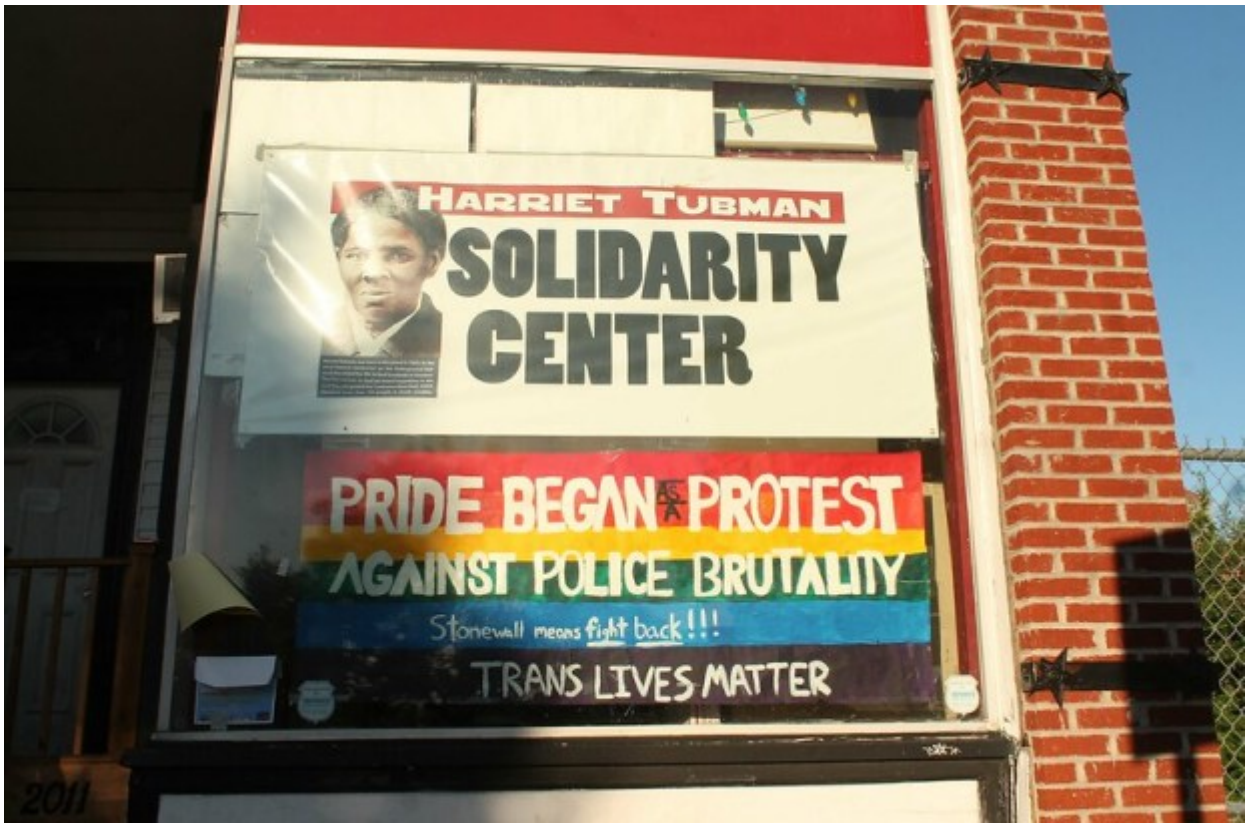
By the 2000s, there were far more vocal trans people speaking about the humiliating way that, for example, access to

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

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