

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND THE STATE

Introduction to socialist feminism


Protecting women beyond policing

Sex-positive feminism

The Grunwick strike

Support Afghan women against
the Taliban

Abortion rights in the US
and more!



THEY CAME
WITH FLOWERS
YOU CAME
WITH FORCE

IN THIS ISSUE

Feminist ABCs

An introduction to socialist feminism

By Kelly Rogers

3

Gendered violence & State violence

If not more police and stiffer sentences, then what will tackle violence against women?

By Kelly Rogers

4

Sex-positive feminism isn't (just) about sex, it's about power

By Elizabeth Butterworth

7

CMS: Money before women's safety

By Janine Booth

8

Re-examining society's stories about rape

By Roxana Fraser

9

Labour Women's Solidarity with Domestic Violence Refugees

By Janine Booth

10

Queer politics

Why and how trans people exist, work and struggle

By Zack Muddle

11

No Race-Baiting, Red-Baiting, or Queer-Baiting! The Marine Cooks and Stewards Union

By Michelle O'Brien

14

History Long read

"We are the lions, Mr Manager" Honour the Grunwick Strike

By Jean Lane

15

International

Could the online sex trafficking act be the new war on drugs?

By Ellie Clarke

20

A new generation of Kyrgyz heroines

By Katie Dollar

22

Educating women, changing mindsets

By Sarah Morgan

23

Support Afghan women against the Taliban

By Jane Evans

24

A Feminsit speaks from inside Kabul

By Mariam, an activist with the Revolutionary Afghan Womens Association (RAWA)

25

Afghan sportswomen abandoned

By Janine Booth

26

Texas and the fragility of reproductive rights in the USA

By Katie Dollar

28

Contact us

Women's Fightback is a socialist feminist publication produced by Workers' Liberty.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Kelly Rogers

Workers' Liberty believes that the liberation of women can only happen with the emancipation of humanity as a whole, through the socialist transformation of society. That transformation can only happen through working-class struggle, with women playing a full and equal role.

The working class is the vast majority of people: immensely diverse, but united by our dependency on waged labour to survive. Men and women both depend on waged labour, but it is mainly women who have a burden of both waged labour and unpaid domestic labour. Class societies have used women's historic and current role in childbearing to maintain a gendered division of labour that influences the availability, price and type of waged labour men and women do.

Misogyny, sexism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other divisions suit the interests of capital because:

- they provide the basis for extreme exploitation of minority groups: for example, the driving down of wages and conditions for women workers, migrant workers, and so on.
- they undermine working-class solidarity and resistance: if you are busy hating your neighbour, you forget how much you ought to hate your boss.

Women's oppression also provides the grist for some aspects of homophobia and transphobia. These have other roots as well, but a thread that runs through is an ideology around gender conformity: rigid ideas about gender presentation, what it means to be a "real" woman or man and strict gender roles in the nuclear family.

The family is a central focus for us. It is currently, and has historically been a key instrument for capitalist accumulation: helping to depress wages and ensure the reproduction of workers' labour power, both day-to-



A poster from See Red Women's Workshop

day and generation-to-generation. The things we do to keep our families and communities going are mostly done for free, or by very low-waged workers, like nannies and cleaners.

The family has also been the site of gendered oppression and immiseration: the gendered division of labour, bullying and domestic violence, isolation and loneliness. But the family, despite its many flaws, remains a means by which working-class people can not just survive but find degrees of real fulfilment and pleasure in our daily lives.

So as socialist feminists, we want to expand the fulfilling and pleasurable aspects of familial relationships — giving people opportunities to nurture the relationships that are important to them and eradicating unhealthy power dynamics between partners, between parents and children, etc.

By overthrowing class society and cutting the roots of oppression, we can create the conditions for the liberation of all of humanity. In a society based on democracy and solidarity, it will be possible to work to end all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Likewise, building a common socialist project that is feminist will create a organised working class that is fighting fit, empowered and working in common cause. In other words, without the abolition of class exploitation, there can be no end to women's oppression. But without a mass movement of organised, mobilised women fighting for liberation, there can be no socialist revolution.

We fight for:

- taxation of the rich, expropriate the banks; increase public funds to provide adequate, publicly-provided support services for all women — including trans women.
- a living wage for all workers; decent, affordable housing, and a comprehensive benefits and welfare system.
- solidarity across borders, free movement worldwide and full citizenship rights for migrants.
- the decriminalisation of sex work and workers' rights for all; including a comprehensive right to strike, freely and without limitation; for strong, democratic, militant, feminist trade unions.
- sexual freedom and liberation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people; for comprehensive sex and relationship education and healthy, positive attitudes towards sex.
- safe, legal and free contraception and abortion on demand and an end to the social pressures and stigmatisation around women's reproductive choices.
- a secular society, in which religion does not dictate women's roles, clothing or any other aspects of our lives
- a complete breakdown of the public/private divide and reorganisation of the domestic sphere; free, flexible, universal childcare; expanded parental rights at work; a shorter working week.



IF NOT MORE POLICE AND STIFFER SENTENCE, WHAT WILL TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Kelly Rogers

In March this year, the news broke that Sarah Everard had been snatched when walking home in South London, and murdered by a serving police officer. People came together, in person and online, to mourn her death and to share their own stories of fear and of anger, of harassment and abuse. At Clapham Common, her local park, thousands gathered for a vigil and protest that was violently broken up by the police.

The history of how gendered violence has been treated in law tells us a lot about how sexist our society is. In 1857, a man was able to beat his wife, so long as the implement he used to do it was no thicker than his thumb. In 1895 a City of London bye-law criminalised wife-beating between the hours of 10pm and 7am, because the noise was keeping people awake. In 1956, rape was legally defined for the first time. In the 1970s, in the context of a flourishing women's movement, significant steps forward were made: the first Select Committee on violence against women was held in 1975; the first legislation to combat domestic violence was introduced in

1976, quickly followed by legislation facilitating women to get housing if they are leaving an abusive partner; and the first domestic violence refuge in the world opened in London in 1979. It wasn't until 1991 that rape within marriage was criminalised.

Feminist political norms around violence against women – manifested in calls for more police and stiffer sentences – reflect decades of having to fight to have sexual and domestic violence recognised as crimes, victims as victims, and perpetrators as perpetrators. The battles won by the feminist movement in the 1970s and since have gone a long way to improve the lot of victims of gendered violence in Britain, as well as changing social attitudes more broadly. Recent victories over up-skirting (made a crime in 2019) and revenge porn (in 2015) show that there are still victories to be made on this front.

But there is a difference between acknowledging that progress has been made in terms of the law on the one hand, and simply trusting the state and the police on the other. When the police attacked the Sarah Everard vigil on Clapham Common earlier this year, Keir Starmer described it as

“deeply disturbing”, and made a series of public statements calling for action to end violence against women. But among the sensible – if rather vague – Labour responses was something quite different: a call for “more police on the beat”.

Are the police a solution?

Seeing a heavier police presence as a solution to gendered violence relies on a worldview that sees the police as a neutral body working in the interests of the public, and not as a partially-armed (and dangerous) force working in the service of the state. We see this latter role constantly in the violent repression of protest, or when police break up strikes. An FOI request made earlier this year revealed that between 2012 and 2018, there were 594 complaints of sexual misconduct made against Met employees, 119 of which were upheld. Not only are the police bad at dealing with abuse – they are often a source of abuse and harassment themselves.

Then there is the role that they play in terrorising migrants and ethnic minority communities. The fact that police forces across the western world are rife with racism is not a coincidence,

or simply a passive reflection of racism in society. The primary role of the police is to protect private property, patrol borders and wage campaigns on behalf of the state (from the war on drugs to crackdown on anti-social behaviour) which are proxies for a policy of racial and social exclusion and oppression.

The basic thing that police are permitted to do is to use violence – whereas ordinary citizens are not – and the crucial question for feminists therefore has to be: is police violence – and the punitive criminal justice system that runs alongside it – the solution? The answer we must give to this is: no.

Of course, we do often rely on the police if we are in danger, and – again, of course – we rightly celebrate when men like Harvey Weinstein are finally called to account, and their victims vindicated. But police can only be seen as a sticking plaster; a minimal source of protection in the absence of bigger, better solutions to deep-rooted social issues.

And when victims of sexual and domestic violence turn to the police, the system systematically fails them, and not only in terms of the tiny number of rape or domestic violence cases that reach court. In the unlikely event that a perpetrator is successfully convicted, the evidence shows that prison doesn't work, at least not on any reasonable metrics.

It doesn't stop people committing crimes – 47 per cent of prisoners re-offend within one year of release – all the while churning people through a system that is itself incredibly inhumane and violent. Rather than seeking to make perpetrators better people – to come to terms with what they've done and nurture empathy with the victim, prison works on the basis of "serving time". Between four and five percent of the global prison population are sexually assaulted every year, and one percent are raped – all part of a cycle of violence and dehumanisation which makes us less, not more,

safe.

The system is also remarkably blind to the needs of victims of violence, who are regularly criminalised themselves. A 2017 report by the Prison Reform Trust found that 57 percent of women in prison have been victims of domestic violence, and that 53 percent have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child (compared to 27 percent of men). The report also found that women often commit criminal offences in the context of coercive relationships, and that when they turn to the police for help, they are met with disbelief and hostility.

Reverse cuts, support victims

The problem we have then is that, by and large, the police don't keep us safe – and prisons don't work. So, what will?

The simplest place to start is with demands that will allow women to leave abusive relationships and violent situations. Cuts to services have made it immeasurably harder for people to leave dangerous situations, live in safety and without fear, and move on. Cuts over the past decade have seen refuges being shut down, a crisis in social housing provision and devastating cuts to legal aid. Specialist domestic violence services are being outsourced and hollowed out. We need long-term funding for sexual abuse and domestic violence services to meet the needs of all victims, including specialist services for BAME

and LGBTIQ people and the provision of flexible mental health support and counselling for victims, through long-term recovery. Services must be under public control and run for the benefit of victims, not for profit.

We also know that those most likely to be trapped in violent situations are those on the margins of society. Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, sex workers, workers on poverty wages struggling to feed themselves and their children: these are the people who are most at risk, and are being systematically let down.

We need access to safe and secure housing for all, which means rent controls and building more social housing.

We need a proper living wage and decent conditions at work, the right to organise, and a generous benefits system that treats everyone with respect.

We need an end to the Hostile Environment and "no recourse to public funds" policies for migrants, and the closing down of all detention centres.

Within the criminal justice system, we must demand a system that works for survivors – one which does not ignore, neglect and re-traumatise. That means ensuring that survivors are not criminalised and investigated as guilty parties by the police. Legal aid will need to be provided universally, and the family court system will need complete reform. The police, too, need a complete overhaul. For the



Kill the Bill protest, May 2021 (@SistersUncut)

time being, we do rely on the police for minimal protection, but it needs to be made fit for purpose and purged of its worst elements. Some proposals for police reform have been published below.

Going further

But if we are going to work towards ending gendered violence, treating the causes and not just the symptoms, that will mean getting to the root of society's greatest dysfunctions.

The commonly held belief, when it comes to the police and the prison system, is that we are by our nature, self-interested and we need the state to impose order, by violent means if necessary. But what if that isn't true? It is true that people exhibit behaviours which are brutal and cruel. But what if these behaviours aren't anything to do with "human nature", but a reflection of a system which constantly brutalises us?

In her recent social history of rape, Mithu Sanyal recalls that "Sexual violence as the triumph of man's power over woman is a trope in rape narratives. However, Hannah Arendt argued that violence signifies neither triumph nor power but powerlessness. Because power needs consensus – even the most despotic system can only continue in the long run if enough people benefit from it – violence arises out of the cracks of power." Sexual violence is part of a system of wider of gendered oppression, in which men are empowered at women's expense – but on some level, it is also the product of a much wider sense of powerlessness and humiliation.

Sexual violence is most prevalent in societies and institutions that are the most unequal, the most hierarchical: in the military, in private schools and in prisons. "A basic rule of thumb", argues Sayal, "is: if an institution or a community is hierarchical and favours rigid gender roles, its members are more at risk of sexual violence than members of a society that is more equal (in relation to, but by no

means restricted to, gender)."

A kind of dehumanisation is central to the way that our society functions. Prisons and the military function by robbing people of empathy – but they are only an extreme example of a much wider exploitation and alienation, one which is overseen by different kinds of hierarchies. Traditional conceptions of masculinity, at least in the west, are built on something similar: men are taught to distance themselves emotionally from themselves and those around them. The result of these processes is that we have created a society in which violence is normalised, and in which a large number

of people lack common decency and regard empathy as a weakness.

This is not to say that perpetrators of violence and abuse are somehow guiltless – that society "made them that way" – it's not that simple. We must work towards a system of genuine restorative justice which holds perpetrators to account for their actions and best enables victims to move on with their lives. But that work will be best done when we have rejected calls for "more police on the beat", or for harsher prison sentences, and are fighting in earnest for a social order built on equality, mutual respect and solidarity.

Curb police powers!

In the wake of the global wave of Black Lives Matter protests, following George Floyd's murder last year, Workers' Liberty printed the following objectives for the movement to organise around, for reforming the police.

1. The right of oppressed people and the labour movement to self-defence against police violence.
2. Curb police powers, including: sharply restricting the use of force; aggressive prosecution of police who kill and violate human rights; abolition of stop and search; ending undercover infiltration of social movements; disarming and demilitarisation. Replace the Independent Office for Police Conduct with a strong, elected body. Restore and expand legal aid.
3. Accountability including subordinating forces to elected local representatives with real control over budgets and operational policy.
4. Reforms to reduce the police's role in society and stop criminalising swathes of working-class people, including: dramatically reducing the prison population; an end to police dealing with mental health emergencies; an end to persecuting youth



under the banner of combating gangs; an end to persecuting homeless people; legalisation of drugs; decriminalisation of sex work; an end to persecuting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

5. Dismantle the anti-immigrant apparatus; abolish the immigration police. Halt the Tories' rush to a hard Brexit.

6. Instead of more police: emergency funding to block a new wave of cuts to services; reversal of all cuts since 2010; then major increases in public spending – taking collective, democratic control of wealth to ward off a social disaster and begin to meet working-class needs for decent jobs, homes, benefits and services (including youth services, refugees, mental health services, drug rehab). Abolition of anti-migrant restrictions such as NRPF and the NHS surcharge.



SEX-POSITIVE FEMINISM ISN'T (JUST) ABOUT SEX, IT'S ABOUT POWER

Elizabeth Butterworth

Recently I've been reflecting on sex-positive feminism and whether it needs a revival. The term may not be immediately clear if you aren't versed on second- and third-wave feminism in the west, so it's important to point out that it came about as a rejection of some radical feminist ideas.

Radical lesbian feminist thinkers like Jill Johnston, Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love posited that heterosexuality itself upheld patriarchy through the "personal domination" of women by men. In order to be truly free from men and the influence of patriarchy, you must "be a dyke."

The ideas of some radical feminists when it comes to pornography and sex work were persuasive to thousands of feminists and still are today. Writers like Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin argued that selling sex takes away consent: money invalidates someone's ability to freely consent. Dworkin wrote "Prostitution in and of itself is an abuse of a woman's body." (1) Catherine Mackinnon wrote, "If prostitution is not a free choice, why are the women with the fewest choices the ones most often found doing it?" (2)

The latter is a fair question. As a socialist feminist I wouldn't dispute that work, or earning money, is a necessity to survive in a capitalist society. Of course, economic factors including class must drive large parts of sex work. But does this negate women's agency entirely, or make us unable to consent? Possibly not.

"If women have little choice, shouldn't we campaign for them to have choice, rather than removing sex work as an option?"

Mackinnon, Dworkin, Dines and others would argue that pornography is, like "prostitution", an act of male violence where women are subsumed and commodified and "used as receptacles". Robin Morgan wrote, "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice." (3) I don't doubt that there is tons of violent porn and that porn actors/ workers are more often than not treated poorly.

The difficulty I have with ideas like

this, though, is that, whatever our experiences or reasoning, if we disagree with them, we are simply duped by the patriarchy. There's absolutely no room for questioning these all-consuming assumptions, or with coming up with ways we could empower porn/sex workers such as union organising or campaigning for better rights. Doing so, despite the tangible effects it could have on many people's lives, makes socialists and feminists into rape-enablers and handmaidens of the patriarchy.

In asserting this, radical feminism actually subsumes women's voices – unless they agree with them – and acts as a kind of bossy big sister feminism where the subtext is "I know best" and "do what I say", replacing critical thinking and women's agency.

For reasons I would struggle to explain (especially as someone born in the 1980s) I've recently found myself consuming feminist content on the social media app TikTok, where typically users are much younger than those on Facebook (everyone's gran is on Facebook these days) or even on Instagram (which is much loved by millennials). There's actually a lot of good feminist stuff on there – that's why I've stayed, I guess – including

brief, punchy explainers on things like the male gaze, hilarious responses to misogynist “dating coaches” and critiques of art and culture like a recent trend of “written by a man” showing the absurd sexualisation of women in some media (also very witty!).

It’s about time that we brought back the debates we were having 30+ years ago: not because younger feminists need to be patronised or “put right”, but because if you believe in your ideas you should persuade others of them. I found it instructive ten years ago to read and understand these debates and to also see with my own eyes the massive shift that occurred (partly due to our activists) in attitudes to sex work.

It needs to be explained to as many people as possible that sex-positive feminism isn’t about thinking sex is great or empowering in some way. (A lot of sex would appear to be just quite boring, from what I read, which is reason #3167 we need better sex

education.) Sex positive feminism is about believing women when they tell us that their relationship with a man is not coercive or inherently poisonous. It’s about believing women who say they’d rather sell nudes than work a minimum wage job. It’s about believing women who say their home-made porn isn’t hurting anyone.

But, more importantly, it’s about finding solutions that actually make sense. If women, as Mackinnon asserts, have little choice, shouldn’t we campaign for them to have choice, rather than removing sex work as an option? Shouldn’t we instead be campaigning for much better safety nets for the unemployed, for massive pay rises for millions of people, for immigration amnesties and decriminalising migration? That’s not to say that we shouldn’t prosecute human traffickers or sexually exploitative pimps, but we should make it easier for people to work safely and less likely that they turn to them in desperation for

exploiters safety or protection they need. At the moment, our sex work laws are just as likely to target two women working in the same residence for their own safety.

“Women who don’t have choices” is surely code for women without immigration papers, women on poverty wages or no wages, women doing unpaid reproductive labour to support dependents and the like. Capitalist economics and ideology are hugely important and will often use the remaining forces of patriarchy to continue to exploit us. Socialist feminism has the most satisfactory answers to working class women’s lives, and always has.

- (1) Dworkin 1993, *Prostitution and Male Supremacy*
- (2) Mackinnon 1993, *Prostitution and Civil Rights*
- (3) Morgan 1973, *Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape*

CHILD MAINTENANCE SERVICE: MONEY BEFORE WOMEN'S SAFETY

Janine Booth

In May 2017, Emma Day was stabbed to death by her ex-partner, Mark Morris, father of one of the two kids she had just dropped off at school. Morris had repeatedly threatened to kill Emma, warning her not to try to make him pay child support. Emma told the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) this several times, but still they pursued Morris for money. He murdered her a few days after the CMS reinstated its claim for money from him.

Two years on, a Domestic Homicide Review into Emma’s death recommended urgent reform of the CMS. Two years after that, the Coroner’s report into her killing has revealed that the reform has not happened. Women and children are still at risk. The report now sits on government desks, but women and children need action now, not the ‘review’ promised by the DWP ‘in due course’.

Thirty years ago, I and others were campaigning against the Child Support Act, knowing that it would put women and children at risk. Half of women claiming child support have experienced domestic violence.

The Act – and government policy ever since – is soaked



Emma Day

in the gender stereotypes of mother as carer, father as breadwinner. Although it applies equally to men and women, regardless of which parent no longer lives with the kids, the law refers to the absent parent as ‘he’ and declares his responsibility to the child met so long as he pays money.

RE-EXAMINING SOCIETY'S STORIES AROUND RAPE

Roxana Fraser

A review of *Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo*, by Mithu Sanyal (Verso, 2019)

I've spent my whole life avoiding rape, looking over my shoulder before I put the key in the door. Sadly, it's an experience that most – if not all – women are familiar with, which is why Mithu Sanyal's book, *Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo*, is so welcome. Covering a huge amount of material, and using moving personal accounts throughout, the book is a bold and refreshing assessment of the gender narratives and social roots underpinning how society views rape and rape victims.

Trauma and Healing

Sanyal looks at the language we use to talk about rape, and how that impacts how rape is processed by victims and judged by society. Readers are invited to reflect on how rape has throughout history destroyed a woman's life. Societal perceptions have informed how a rape victim should feel: for honour to be seen to be intact, that sense of shame should never go away. You are told, "you never get over it." Any other response other than trauma is taken to suggest that you're not a real victim, and is met with disbelief and hostility. This is despite, as Sanyal emphasises, many victims of violence do "get over it". People experience and process violence differently and each of these different experiences is "normal", shared by countless others, and absolutely valid.

I don't think the concepts she covers are all new but Sanyal's book could be a catalyst to start new dialogue about how we assess rape and sexual boundaries. Sanyal says, "...because we lack social scripts for victim's healing after rape, we also lack scripts for rapists to reform and re-enter soci-



Mithu Sanyal, author of *Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo and Vulva*

ety." Quoting Brensell, she continues, "If, for example, a person is living in a situation where their boundaries are transgressed regularly, healing will be harder. That applies not only to violent personal relationships but to exploitative working conditions. Healing begins with the most basic things." In other words, poor social conditions and unequal power relations can be an obstacle to healing from trauma.

Racism

In her chapter 'Black-and-White thinking', Sanyal points to the recurrent trope of the black rapist and draws parallels with the media and public response to the widely-reported incident at Cologne Cathedral on New Years Eve 2016, which saw 500 reports of crimes of a sexual nature, 21 one them sexual assaults. Local and international press reports focused on the perpetrators being foreign, men of Arabic and North African appearance, and the aftermath saw a clamouring for refugees to be sent "home" and for increased measures to deter illegal immigration. Sanyal writes, "the stranger behind the bush

is back, only now he is the stranger of Arabic appearance." These are nationalist, anti-immigrant and colonial narratives, that we see played out in Britain too

Men and Masculinity

Sanyal also interrogates how we understand gender. She quotes bell hooks,

"So far the feminist movement has primarily focused on male violence, and as a consequence lends credibility to sexist stereotypes that suggest men are violent, women are not; men are abusers, women are victims. This type of thinking allows us to ignore the extent to which women (with men) in this society accept and perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable for a dominant part or group to maintain power over the dominated by using coercive force."

Looking at case studies on sexual violence challenges simplistic narratives of women always being victims and men always being perpetrators. Sanyal cites one study which revealed that 79% of perpetrators who forced penetration on men were women.

Sexual violence and rape is, of course, a deeply gendered phenomenon, however. Sanyal presents evidence that the rates of incidences of rape are highest where an institution or a community is hierarchical and favours rigid gender roles where: "hierarchical command structures are the opposite of consensual communication where decisions are negotiated collectively." Prisons, boarding schools and, above all, the military are all examples where this is the case. In these institutions, misogynistic and anti-individualistic behaviour are systemic: "the moment a person enters the military, they surrender the right of self-determination over their bodies". People are forced to discard

or bury the “feminine” parts of themselves, like empathy.

Sanyal argues this process of institutionalised behaviour is not the domain of military men alone but military women as well: that research suggests a reduction in empathy makes it easier to disregard a person’s boundaries and when your own boundaries are regularly transgressed, you’re more likely to replicate that behaviour. When we have empathy for ourselves, we have empathy for others.

Sanyal alludes to the solution when she affirms “...that social equity, gender equality, balance, consent, respect, and nonviolent communication – outside of the sexual sphere as much as within it – are direct ways to prevent sexual violence.” She goes on, “the more equal a society and the higher its opportunities for participation, the lower its rape rate.” And here:

At the same time, we know full well that not all decisions are free. So it seems obvious that preventing abuses of power must involve reducing inequality. This means understanding that policies we might not ordinarily associate with sexual violence may have far-reaching consequences – for instance, granting people a living wage, access to education, health care, and safe living conditions increase their access to self-determination and allows them to make freer choices. The bad news is that this can only be achieved through fundamental social change. The good news is that every step to reduce inequality is a direct step toward the prevention and reduction of sexual violence. And this is not restricted to questions of gender.

Here is where, for me, the book feels

incomplete. Sanyal is right to point to inequality, meant in the broadest terms, as the context which allows violent and abusive relations to flourish – and ending inequality as our starting point to tackling gendered violence. The above excerpts come incredibly close to identifying the structures that allow and perpetuate these inequalities, but had I blinked I could easily have missed it.

The origins of the word rape: “literally the meaning of the English word rape, comes from the Middle English *rapen*, *rappen* – “to abduct, ravish, snatch, carry off” – which in turn comes from the Latin root *rapere* – or, “robbing.” Capitalism is the system that’s founded on robbing us of our value as human beings; without the critique of capitalism we are only ever looking for change at the limits of a capitalist society.

LABOUR WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REFUGES

Janine Booth,
Women's Officer Lewes CLP

Lewes Labour Women have combined practical solidarity with political campaigning and policy discussion in taking on the issue of violence against women.

Six months into lockdown, we asked Labour members in Lewes constituency to donate clothes, toys and other items for our local women’s refuge. We knew that lockdown had made domestic violence more common, leaving an abusive relationship more difficult, and refuges unable to meet demand. Driving round our patch of East Sussex collecting donations also meant talking with members about the need for political campaigning. We had no intention of plugging the funding gap left by Tory cuts without also challenging those cuts!

So we asked members to take part in Women’s Aid’s online campaign against cuts, and passed a resolution at our Lewes Labour Women’s branch meeting setting out the devastating effects of underfunding. The resolution asked for Labour’s manifesto for the then-approaching East Sussex County Council election to include a clear pledge to reverse the Tory council’s 20% cut to its funding of the county’s four women’s refuges made in 2016. The Constituency Labour Party passed the resolution unanimously, but no-one was quite sure what the process

was for getting the pledge into the manifesto. Many enquiries and phone calls later, we got a version of it included in an election leaflet. We also submitted

the resolution (tweaked to make it relevant nationally) to Labour Women’s Conference, where it was composited with others, passed, and chosen to go forward to Labour Party conference.

Labour does not allow its branches to meet in the two months before an election (for reasons that do not convince me), but we wanted to carry on discussing violence against women, so we set up a discussion group, which met online.

Our local refuge was delighted with the great piles of donations we passed on, and we topped this up with the money raised by selling the rest of the donations at a boot sale.

We will continue to do our best to call clearly for Labour councils to reverse cuts to refuge funding. It is important that concrete acts of resistance like this are not drowned out by appeals to law-and-order from the leadership.





WHY AND HOW TRANS PEOPLE EXIST, WORK AND STRUGGLE

Zack Muddle

Review of Transgender Marxism by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (Pluto Press, 2021).

Marxism offers many tools necessary for any radical fight for trans liberation to succeed – but the theoretical basis for this is rarely fleshed out. Transgender Marxism collects several insightful articles and threads on topics of particular interest for transgender people and activists, using broadly Marxist perspectives. As a collection, it is less a coherent whole, more a sometimes contradictory canapé selection. Yet it is one of the first books attempting to approach this issue from an openly Marxist analytical perspective. I touch on some of the themes below.

Why are there trans people?

In his essay, Noah Zazanis focuses on agency, using “social cognitive theory” (SCT). SCT accounts for psychological, social, and systemic influences on gender. These influences can compete, and gender develops over a whole lifetime, rather than be-

ing either innate, as in some theories, or developing predominantly in early childhood, as in others. This allows both more fluidity and greater agency. By this account “processes of gender identity construction rely on a reciprocal relationship between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors.”

The degree of restriction in a given society influences the relative importance of these three factors: in rigidly gendered societies, environmental factors are more important, personal factors less so. But individuals, to varying extents, make choices and play a part in constructing their social environments. SCT sets out three types of “environmental influence”: “modelling” – passive observation of appropriately gendered behaviour via media and the like; “enactive experience” – where individuals engage in gendered behaviour and adjust it according to their perception of others’ reactions; and “direct tuition” – explicit instructions for appropriate gender conduct.

This seems more sophisticated than most alternative theories, allowing room for agency – including agency for cis, as well as trans and non-binary readers: “Early-life punishment for

gender nonconformity is often regarded as a characteristically trans experience. In reality, however, not only do cis people share similar enacted experiences, but successful discouragement from gender transgression constitutes much of the cisgender phenomenon.”

Zazanis also delves deeper into the process of transition, when individuals subconsciously or consciously seek groups or communities of trans people, who – via the modes SCT sets out – help to reproduce and model different types of trans identity. Some pro-trans activists may consider this point taboo, as it sounds like anti-trans scare-mongering that transgenderism is “contagious”, or spreading “trans ideology”. But if transgenderism is contagious, that’s fine!

We want a world where individuals are more supported in transitioning, with more happy and diverse trans (and non-binary) people that can be positive and empowering models. Likely, more people would transition, or experiment with transitioning – who may in different societies have embraced cisgender identities. To me, that sounds like a more interesting

society, allowing a flowering of individuality, creativity, and personal agency.

Similar themes crop up elsewhere in this volume. In her essay, Anja Heisler Weiser Flower flits from an interesting-but-wrong left-communist exposition of the modern world to spiritual nonsense, from quite extreme identity politics to a transhumanist and cosmological futurism. But hidden under the chaff is a thought-provoking argument that “gender/sex” is a “real abstraction”, analogous to although not a direct parallel to “value”.

“Value” is the socially necessary abstract labour embodied in a commodity, according to a Marxist analysis of capitalism. This is an abstract way of understanding commodities, and their exchange which value (via exchange value and price) mediates. Most people do not consciously think about “value”, and yet, they think and act on the basis of it. You may critique capitalism, but you still need to use money to buy commodities, and will in accordance with their price, and thereby value. Contemplating gender/sex in analogous terms is at least thought provoking.

Work, labour & class struggle

In her chapter, Michelle O’Brien looks at trans people’s experiences and struggles at work. Trans and queer people, O’Brien notes, are disproportionately found in certain types of occupation. This isn’t surprising in a USA where the majority of employers can *openly* fire someone for being trans. Or indeed in the UK, where one in three employees admitted in 2018 that they would be “less likely” to hire a trans person — despite such discrimination being illegal here!

Trans and queer people thus often find themselves working in sex toy retail; or for LGBTIQ or HIV charities and NGOs. O’Brien documents class struggle within these workplaces, often between trans/queer workers and their trans/queer bosses.

This provides a much-needed an-



tidote to liberal and identitarian fetishisation of LGBT+ “communities”, often portrayed as homogeneous, or at least harmonious. As socialists we should aim, to some extent, to divide communities on class lines, and to demarcate them on political lines — and build radical, working-class campaigns on LGBTIQ issues.

Different class divisions appear among sex workers (who are disproportionately trans). Sex workers who meet clients online tended to be more middle class, and more able to keep themselves safe — compared to sex workers who meet clients in person. There needn’t necessarily be an antagonism here between more and less deprived sections of the working-class (and petty-bourgeois). But the reality O’Brien sketches calls for more nuance than some approach this subject with.

Class backgrounds also impact people’s transitions. Some working-class Black or Latinx trans/queer communities and cultural scenes provide limited forms of protection from or resistance to extreme poverty and state violence. They also “support many young transfeminine people to come out and transition much earlier in life than many of their middle-class and white counterparts.” Conversely, some middle class people fear transitioning as a threat to their middle-class status, where they may become forced into retail, sex work, or other culturally and economically “working-class” jobs.

O’Brien’s contribution helps flesh out the interrelations — in individuals’ experiences at least — between class

and trans oppression. It recentres class-struggle, and makes clear that gender regulation at work, as in families, is a major feature of bourgeois class rule.

Kate Doyle Griffiths builds on the writings of Kim Moody, and of Beverly Silver, arguing that waged social reproduction — education and health-care — are strategically crucial for workplace organising.

Griffiths argues that “the skills to manage trans and queer existence on a social level lend themselves to exploitation as skilled labour in the sphere of social reproduction and hospitality... in which it is more difficult to be comfortably out.” For example, she refers to “code-switching”, whereby queer and trans people learn to change their behaviour in response to the anticipated reactions of others, masking and managing our own feelings to do so. She hypothesises “that queer and trans workers [are] vastly over-represented in the work of paid social reproduction”. On the face of this, this is in tension with O’Brien’s view that trans people are generally found in tech, sex work and third sector roles. Griffiths does not seem to offer statistical evidence for her claims, and I could not find evidence which either supports or undermines it. It’s a hypothesis worth exploring further.

One shortcoming of this book is a failure to put the contributors in dialogue with each other. Inadequately serious commitment by the editors to open debate is exposed, for example, in the introduction. The editors attempt to construct a coherent thread running through all the essays in the book, papering over ways in which they clearly disagree, contradict each other, or use the same terms with completely divergent meanings (such as “trans social reproduction”). This makes for a disorientating introduction and a missed opportunity to clarify perspectives.

More convincingly, Griffiths argues that fights over healthcare access

by queer and trans people, far from a distraction from a universalist class politics, adds an empowering dimension and driving force to this fight. Her exposition of the links between LGBTIQ activists and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa is interesting, if not sufficiently emphasising the role of workers' organising in that struggle.

The most Trotskyist author, Virginia Guitel, gives an interesting exposition of the fight over trans rights in Brazil. The volume as a whole would do better with wider consideration of trans struggles around the world, beyond the Anglosphere and beyond Christianity-dominated countries and cultures.

Trans experiences

While JN Hoad, Zoe Belinsky, and Nathaniel Dickson all give interesting insights on the trans experience, I found Belinsky's chapter, 'Transgender and Disabled Bodies: Between Pain and the Imaginary', the most thought-provoking.

"Phenomenology" studies *structures of consciousness* as experienced from the first-person point of view. It studies the structures of experiences including thought, perception, imagination, memory, desire, emotion, volition, embodied action, bodily awareness, and social activity. Its insights have contributed towards many areas of philosophy and psychology.

One component of these structures is "intentionality", the way an experience can be "directed" towards things in the world: mental states can be "of", "about", or "represent" properties, things, or states of affairs.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was a Marxist phenomenologist, building on experimental psychology and developing a phenomenology that emphasises the body and embodiment. For Merleau-Ponty, the body's relationship with space is intentional, an "I can" rather than an "I think"; so that the body is not "in" space but lives or inhabits it.



Griffiths argues the fight for trans healthcare are an empowering addition to universal class struggles

Belinsky takes Merleau-Ponty as a starting point for developing a further phenomenology, particularly around labour, and with that phenomenology an understanding of trans and disabled experiences (experiences in which the body clearly plays an importantly different role compared to those of cis and/or able-bodied people).

Belinsky replaces "I can" with "I cannot": an awareness and experience of the world through our limitations. We are, Belinsky argues, stimulated to work by pain, or to avoid pain. We use the imagination to work. We create plans in our mind, and realise them concretely through conscious physical labour, and so move from "I cannot" to "I can". In doing so, we overcome pain, and create the means to alleviate pain in the future.

I feel hungry, so I imagine going to the kitchen, preparing a meal from ingredients there, then eating it; I then act upon that plan. I wish to not feel hungry in the future, so I engage in waged work, earn money, buy food with that money, and restock my kitchen.

Reproducing ourselves, our ability to work, our labour-power – the movement from the "I cannot" to the "I can" – is mediated by the capitalist mode of production. It requires us to sell our labour-power to capitalists, to work using means of production that they own, producing products that they will own, and then giving our wages back to them in exchange for the necessities of existence that our class produced.

Our labour – working under bosses for another's private profit – is alienated. We feel a disconnect from the experience of using labour, via imagination, to overcome pain. The positive aspects of labour, and the aspects which create the conditions of possibility of experiences, are largely obscured. The theft of our labour-power, and of the means of us recreating it, are also obscured.

[T]he transition to 'I can' is actually the product of conscious human labour – it is not a bare fact of life but must be created through physical toil. This labour – creating human beings in a fit condition to enter the market and exchange their labours for money wages – cannot be assumed in advance, but is the work of social reproduction. Clothing, feeding, cleaning, resting. In short, the whole ensemble of relations and actions that go into reproducing ourselves. This is the unwaged labour by which labourers arrive as ready made products on the labour market – with the 'I can' in tow. In other words, workers are expected to appear at their workplaces with their capacities fully intact. I contend that a process of capacitation is required before the 'I can' is achieved, that this is fundamentally a product of socially reproductive labour. Trans and disabled people, in particular, struggle with this aspect of social reproduction.

As such, the "I cannot" looms larger for trans and disabled people, as so-

ciety creates “debilitating” conditions for them. Belinsky builds upon “social reproduction theory” and upon a “social theory of disability”.

As states increasingly strip away social welfare programmes, this hits groups such as trans and disabled people hardest.

This stripping process constitutes part of a generalised crisis of care as capital appropriates more and more of workers’ waking hours for surplus-value extraction and incorporates more and more women into the workforce, making them less available to carry out the unwaged labour of social reproduction. This crisis of care makes the reproduction of the proletariat one of contemporary capitalism’s central contradictions. On the one hand, the bourgeoisie needs the proletariat to continue to exist in order for the process of capital

accumulation to continue; on the other hand, the bourgeoisie and its representatives in the form of the state are increasingly unconcerned with the reproduction of the working class, the proletariat, to the extent that they undermine the capacities of the proletariat to reproduce itself.

Trans people become “debilitated” through being deprived of a socially recognised identity. They face misgendering, mistreatment, harassment, assault; and firing, exclusion, limited social validation. Trans people’s oppression has direct material as well as ideological and psychological impacts. This has profound impacts on their phenomenological capacities and world, and relationship to labour.

The focus on pain (neglecting pursuit of pleasure) in this chapter is one sided, and Belinsky overstates the revolutionary potential of her insights.

Nonetheless, the chapter builds its insights usefully on Merleau-Ponty. As revolutionary socialists, we are primarily concerned with changing the world. Yet understanding our experiences is the starting point for many in working out if and how to do so. A more rigorous phenomenology, centred on empowerment and a Marxist analysis of society, can help.

Transgender Marxism is hit and miss. Some chapters probably aren’t worth reading, others are worth reading and re-reading. It does not build a truly radical and liberating, class-struggle activist and critically theoretical, anti-Stalinist and revolutionary internationalist Marxist approach to trans politics. Such an approach is possible and is needed. But valuable ideas about why and how trans people exist and relate to class-struggle can push us in that direction.

"NO RACE-BAITING, RED-BAITING OR QUEER-BAITING" THE MARINE COOKS AND STEWARDS UNION

MICHELLE O'BRIEN

Excerpt from: ‘Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Gender Freedom’, *Transgender Marxism*.

On the passenger ocean liners of the 1930s, male workers undertook tasks otherwise considered women’s work when done in the home: cooking and serving food to the passengers, laundry, and janitorial work. On some boats, African-American men were hired for these reproductive service tasks, much like their contemporaries working as railroad porters. On other lines, Chinese men took up this work. Under the white supremacist cultural logic of the US, Black and Chinese men were already considered feminine and appropriate for women’s work. But some of the ocean liner companies prided themselves on maintaining a white workforce, offering an elite experience to a white and racist clientele. Few white men, however, would demean themselves by doing such feminised work. Their employers already considered this type of work somehow ‘queer’. It is here that white gender-nonconforming effeminate men managed to get a foothold in the industry. These stewards found



Members of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union meet, June 10 1952

a solidarity and support among fellow queens, coming to incorporate drag parties, homoeroticism, and soon a defence of gay rights into their work life. Over workplace struggles through the 1930s, ocean liner service workers formed the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, bridging these feminised Black men, Chinese men, and white queer men into a Communist-Party-allied militant labour union. These militant workers organised under the slogan ‘No Race-Baiting, Red-Baiting, or Queer-Baiting!’



"WE ARE THE LIONS, MR MANAGER"

HONOURING THE GRUNWICK STRIKE

Jean Lane

20 August 2021 was the 45th anniversary of the start of one of the most important struggles in British working-class history, the two-year strike by Grunwick film-processing workers in North West London. Below we republish an overview of the strike and its significance written by Jean Lane in 1998.

On 7 November 1977 a pitched battle took place on the streets of North London between the police and thousands of workers. It was one event in a two year struggle for trade union recognition. The strike was called Grunwick and many of the lessons from it were similar to those that were to come out of the great miners strike of 1984-5 seven years later, and out of the Liverpool Dockers' strike [1995-8]. Questions of solidarity, the law, the role of the state, the need for rank-and-file organisation across the trade unions – all were raised then, as they have been by working class struggle since.

The Grunwick strike, however, was different from other big battles of the working class before it or since in one significant way. It was, in many ways, a strike that was not meant to happen. It did not involve workers in a large, powerful union with a militant history like, the miners who had brought the Tory government down only a few years before in 1974, or the dockers or engineers who had helped the miners close the Saltley Gates in 1972. The workers

of Grunwick were not unionised at all and had no experience of being in a union. They were mostly women, in large part young women, who had to fight their families for the right to join the picket line; they were overwhelmingly Asian, many of whom spoke little English, and who were being employed by Grunwick because they could be used as cheap labour. Yet their struggle would reverberate throughout the labour movement.

Conditions at Grunwick

Grunwick was a small film processing plant situated on two sites: Chapter Road and Cobbold Road, in Willesden, North London. Conditions inside the factory were appalling. The workers had no representation. Rates of pay differed from one individual to another – white workers were employed on different (higher paid) jobs. Overtime was compulsory and could be imposed at a moment's notice. Conditions inside the centre of the dispute, the mail order department at Chapter Road, were particularly draconian.

Grunwick made itself competitive by paying low wages – about £28 for a 40 hour week: the national average for wages at that time was £72 and a full time woman manual worker in London got £44 – and by providing a fast service to people sending photographs in by post [this was long before digital photography].

The pressure inside the mail order department was very high and the manager, a Mr Alden, ruled it like a despot. If women asked for time off to look after sick children they

were told, "This is not a holiday camp". Compulsory overtime could be imposed when a woman was going to pick her child up from nursery. She would have to either work on worrying about the fate of her child or argue with her supervisor and get the sack. Sackings were high. The annual staff turnover was 100%! There was an atmosphere of subservience and fear.

Wildcat action

The summer of 1976 was a record-breaking hot one. Inside the mail order department there were no windows and no air conditioning. It was a very profitable time for Grunwick. People were taking photos as if they were on permanent holiday. The pressure of work was incredible. Four young men, who had earlier discussed the need for a trade union, decided to work slowly one Friday afternoon right under Alden's nose. One was sacked and the other three walked out, leaving a huge crate of work unfinished. That might have been the end of it as the four had no idea what to do next and just hung around the gates outside. Inside, an argument developed between Alden and one of the women workers, Mrs Jayaben Desai, who was to become one of the leaders of the strike and its most eloquent participant. She had just been told that she could not go home as more work had come in. She demanded her cards and then instead of just leaving made a speech to the other workers standing in two sweltering lines along their work bench. When Alden compared the workers to "chattering monkeys", Desai replied: "What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. But in a zoo there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance on your fingertips, others are lions who can bite your head off. We are the lions, Mr Manager." She and her son Sunil joined the other four still hanging around the gate.

The following Monday the six turned up with placards and petitions. Every member of the mail order department and other workers besides signed, on their way in to work, to say they wanted a trade union. Sunil rode to the nearest Citizens Advice Bureau on his bicycle to find out what to do next. They gave him the phone numbers of APEX, the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs, the TUC and Brent Trades Council. At 3pm that day fifty other workers in the mail order department walked out. The strike had begun.

The strikers marched to Cobbold Road where Grunwick's processing department was situated. The managers at Cobbold Road locked the doors, imprisoning the workers inside and turned up the radios so that no contact could be made between the strikers and the workers inside. One young woman had her face slapped when she tried to open a window. Another was threatened with a broken bottle by a driver guarding the entrance. Only seven workers joined the strike from Cobbold Road that day. A mass meeting was called of all workers in a local car park, at which the



decision to join a union was agreed. The management said they would rather the plant closed than see a union in it. The strikers said they would not return as individuals, only as a union. Sixty workers joined APEX. More workers over the next week walked out of Cobbold Road until there were 137 strikers out of a workforce of 480. Thus began what might have been a small, localised, unwritten story of a strike for trade union recognition, but which became a long battle, nationally and internationally known, and which involved thousands of other workers from up and down the country.

The striking workers were sacked and the fight quickly became one for reinstatement as well as recognition. APEX wanted a speedy resolution to the dispute through negotiation. But George Ward, the owner of Grunwick, refused. They then tried to get independent arbitration through ACAS, but Ward, full of his own important right to rule his own workers as he pleased ("I can buy a Patel for £15") wouldn't recognise their right to tell him what to do. His cause was taken up by the right wing and anti-union National Association For Freedom (NAFF) who funded and handled all Ward's legal business for the duration of the strike. They threatened, for example, legal action against the postal workers union, the UPW, for blacking Grunwick's mail. Tom Jackson, leader of the UPW immediately called the blacking off.

Strikers did get support. Kodak workers blacked photographic supplies to the factory. Grunwick managers bought it themselves in small quantities and smuggled it through

the picket line in the boots of their cars. The postal workers refused to cross the picket line, so Grunwick had to go and collect it themselves. Mail order work from Germany, Belgium and Holland could only be got in by moving from port to port and eventually buying their own plane and flying it to small airfields.

Victimisation and Violence

Managers baited strikers on the picket lines from behind the gates, and bullied them on their way in. Mrs Desai had her foot run over by one car and was taken to hospital. A pregnant woman was knocked over. The response of APEX was to call for a court of inquiry.

But they got bogged down in the law, strikers got left at the gate, demoralised, until one morning in March 1977 when only one picket turned up. He was later found badly beaten up. Complaints to the police were met with "he deserved what he got". The police continued to pick off and harass pickets on the picket line. Mrs Desai was arrested and charged with assault of two of the Grunwick managers. She was 4'11" tall and on the other side of a high fence at the time. Not surprisingly her case was later dropped and the courts on releasing other pickets rapped the police over the knuckles for trying to impose a six-person picket which was not law. Costs were awarded against them.

By now the strikers had lost any faith in the law or the police to be fair; or indeed, in the official labour movement to help them. Mahmood Ahmad, secretary of the strike committee, said: "The TUC should be coming to ask us how they can help. Instead we have to keep going to them". And Jayaben Desai expressed her bitterness at being left on the picket line: "Official action from the TUC", she said, "is like honey on your elbow; you can smell it, you can see

it, but you can never taste it".

The strikers put out a call for a mass picket. There was to be a week of action and the first picket on Monday 13 June 1977 was to be a women's picket which was, in the strike committee's mind, to emphasise the "peaceful intention of the picket" and to have a "restraining effect on the police". Far from it. The police, on the day, punched, kicked and dragged pickets across the road by their hair. This happened to Mrs Desai and she was kicked repeatedly. Another woman, arrested in the same way, was released by the police who were immediately surrounded by a crowd of angry, sari-clad women, screaming at them to let her go. The ferocity of their response took the police by surprise. Johnny Patel of the strike committee was repeatedly hit by a policeman who was yelling in a rage, "You Paki bastard".

More workers from Cobbold Road joined the strike. Post Office workers at the Cricklewood office unofficially resumed their blacking of Grunwick's mail against the instruction of their leader Tom Jackson, and the other offices refused to handle it if it was transferred to their offices. T&G drivers refused to carry police to Chapter Road. Even bank workers attempted to get the handling of Grunwick's account blacked.

Collective action

By Friday of that week the mass picket was 1,500 strong. For the first time pickets outnumbered police. The week of action was extended and hopes were running high. On seeing the police put in their place by row upon row of engineers, dockers, seamen and builders, after a whole winter of watching them harassing and intimidating young women, Jayaben Desai said: "When they talked of the power of the trade union movement I listened but I didn't really believe. Now I see that power."

That week, Grunwick began bussing their scabs into the plant to prevent any contact with the pickets.

And for the first time ever the Special Patrol Group (SPG), an armed, specially organised section of the police force, supposedly to deal with "terrorism", was used in a trades dispute.

For the following month Grunwick's picket lines were the lead item on everyone's TVs. The police brutality was unbelievable. One miner described Saltley as a children's Sunday picnic in comparison. The media's lies too were extraordinary: getting in good practice for the next miners' strike to come. (Print workers, on more than one occasion, took industrial action to redress the media balance in favour of the strikers). Just as the arch scab from Nottinghamshire's coalfields during the 1984 miner's strike was to be lauded as "Silver Birch", as standing up for decent workers' rights to work, so seven years earlier, George Ward was celebrated for his fine struggle against intimidation from strikers and union "bully boys".

Shocked by the actions of the SPG, the miners called



for a day of action on 11 July. Despite the fact that APEX recognised that it was the police who were creating the violence, they were not for a day of action: "We want to defuse the situation, not exacerbate it." They preferred, instead, to put their faith in the Court of Inquiry. The strike committee, however, who had a bellyful of legal loopholes, welcomed the call.

The TUC and APEX decided to defuse the 11 July mass picket by calling a march for the same day. They instructed the strike committee to call off the picket and support the march. The strike committee refused, calling on trade unionists to support both. This was a mistake.

On the day, a fantastic show of strength occurred outside Grunwick. 20,000 supporters turned up, outnumbering police 3-1 and pushing them down the road. The scab bus was kept out. There was no violence and few arrests. But at 11am the vast majority of pickets went off to join the march on the other side of Willesden. The bus got in and 24 isolated pickets were arrested.

The UPW

Two days before, in a desperate attempt to break the blockade, Grunwick, with the help of NAFF, 250 right-wing volunteers and 150 vehicles, got the built-up mail out of the plant to a depot outside London where it was stamped by strike-breaking "volunteers" and driven to district officers all over the country. The UPW, who now had a grievance of their own since non-union, non-Post Office people had handled the mail, still refused to make the unofficial blacking official. They sent telegrams to UPW branches telling them to sort the mail.

Jackson's spinelessness was matched by that of the leadership of the TUC and APEX in their efforts to wind down the mass pickets and persuade the strike committee to await the outcome of the Court of Inquiry. The strike committee called over their heads for a solid turnout every day and for another huge turnout for 8 August. Their concerns were now threefold. They still wished to persuade other Grunwick workers to join the dispute, though they knew that they could never have a solid, all-out strike.

Their best chance of winning now was solidarity from other key workforces, blacking essential services to Grunwick and forcing George Ward to give in. The mass picket was also therefore to support and give confidence to the unofficial action taken by the Cricklewood postal workers.

The strikers did not totally dismiss the legal steps that their leadership was taking. To have ACAS rule in favour of the strikers, for example, had been a boost and a good media point in their favour. They saw the mass picket, however, as crucial because it put pressure on the courts and the independent arbiters to rule in their favour.

The trade union bureaucrats wished to use the law rather than direct action. The strikers believed that the action was the key to winning and that the use of the law could

only benefit them while the action continued.

On 29 July, "Black Friday", Roy Grantham, the APEX leader, and Ken Smith met the strike committee to pressurise them into calling 8 August off. At exactly the same time Norman Stagg, Deputy General Secretary of the UPW, met the Cricklewood postal workers to get them to call off their unofficial blacking. He threatened them with expulsion from the union which would affect their pension rights and leave them open to dismissal.

The strike committee were resisting bravely even though they were being threatened with their strike pay being cut by 60%, until word came through that the Cricklewood workers had buckled, voting very narrowly to resume normal working. Mrs Desai angrily attacked the union leadership. She and all of the younger Asian women, who had had to fight their own husbands and parents eleven months earlier to be able to take part in the dispute at all, voted en bloc against calling off the day of action. When a new strike committee was elected soon afterwards, it included five of these militants.

A UPW delegate told the next trades council meeting: "our union leadership has done something that George Ward, John Gorst and the NAFF failed to do. They forced us back."

Three thousand people still turned up to picket on 8 August. The new strike committee began putting pressure on the TUC to sanction the blacking of essential services to Grunwick. This was now the only way to win, but the relevant unions had all told the Grunwick strikers that without



the backing of the TUC their members would not have the confidence to stick their necks out.

At Labour Party conference, the strikers received a standing ovation. A resolution pledging support, however, could only go as far as a call for an amendment to the law forcing employers like Ward to co-operate with ACAS. It was ministers from the Labour government who were overseeing the use of violent police tactics and the introduction of the SPG into a trades dispute, bullying the strikers into submission!

The strikers backed up their lobbying of the TUC and the Labour Party with a resumption of mass picketing and – sensing from those trade unionists who had given them support throughout that there was a limit to the number of times they could be called upon to travel up and down the country without a resolution to the battle in sight – decided to go for one final push to put pressure on the labour movement to help them bring George Ward to his knees. They called a “day of reckoning” for 7 November.

Cop riot

8,000 turned up. The police were savage, meting out organised and indiscriminate violence. One picket had his face smashed through the glass of the police van. Strikers who had become cut off from the main body of protest were made to run the gauntlet between two rows of truncheon-wielding policemen. Heavily protected policemen ran after pickets dressed in no more than shirt sleeves, jeans and trainers, kicked them senseless on the ground and then walked away laughing. 243 pickets were treated for injuries. Twelve had broken bones, 113 were arrested.

When, after this, further requests from the strike committee for the blacking of essential services were met with excuses and empty promises of support, Mrs Desai and three other strikers, in desperation, began a hunger strike outside Congress House. Their union leadership tried to persuade them to do it outside Grunwick instead, offering to lay on the services of a doctor! When the strikers pointed out that George Ward would happily see them starve and went ahead with their plan, they were suspended from the union without strike pay for four months.

For months the strikers continued on their own, taunted by the management on the other side of the gates just as they had at the beginning of the dispute almost two years earlier. They finally announced the end of the dispute on the 14 July 1978. No reinstatements had been achieved. No union got into Grunwick.

Ironically wages inside the plant rose quite considerably during the dispute. At a time when the Labour government was imposing the “Social Contract” on the unions in the form of pay restraint and a holding down of the class struggle, George Ward bought his scab labour with, all told, a 25% across the board wage increase throughout the company. If any other group of workers had demand-

ed this type of pay increase at that time of “tightening of belts to help the country” they would have been slated by the media. George Ward was upheld as a fine and noble character.

That media hypocrisy, the savagery of the police, the support of NAFF for George Ward, and the gutlessness of the workers’ leadership (who were more concerned to bolster up a rocky, minority Labour government than to fight for the ending of sweatshop conditions in their own class) all combined to crush the Grunwick strike.

The two occasions during the dispute when Ward was nearly beaten were those when the courageous Cricklewood postal workers blacked Grunwick’s mail. That kind of rank-and-file confidence and solidarity in spite of weak leadership is the only way workers can ensure that they have the backing needed to win that Ward got from NAFF. Their class stuck together. Ours should too. If the leaders of our movement won’t deliver, the rank and file must organise to force them, or to cast them aside. That same lesson was to surface again, with redoubled force, during the miners strike of 1984-5. Although it was to take place under different conditions, and over different demands, the basic lessons of class solidarity and rank-and-file organisation were the same, as were those of the hypocrisy of the media and the role of the state.

The Grunwick strikers lost, but the labour movement as a whole gained, in two important ways.

Firstly: the strike helped to knock down very forcefully the prejudices inside the movement against black and women workers. It was, at that time, rare for a union to have the kind of anti-racist and anti-sexist policies that are considered the norm now. The myths that black workers are hard to unionise and undercut white workers’ jobs, and that women’s place is in the home and that women only go out to work for pin money, were exploded by this dispute for union recognition, union wages and conditions. A dispute led by Asian and women workers drew in and influenced thousands of other workers everywhere.

Secondly: the few years in the run up to the Grunwick dispute saw a lull in the class struggle in Britain, with low strike figures. The general atmosphere was that of keep your head down, don’t rock the boat, don’t break the law. That goes with a weakly-led movement tied to, and in the pocket of, the government. The Grunwick strike put class struggle back on the agenda, which was to lead, only one year later, to the Winter of Discontent and the downfall of that government.

The Tories learned their lessons well and, piecemeal, removed the unions’ influence on government and shackled the unions with laws that make a legal strike virtually impossible.

The labour movement must learn its lessons too: not to rely on help from above, but to rely on its own strength and solidarity to win.

COULD THE ONLINE SEX TRAFFICKING ACT BE THE NEW WAR ON DRUGS?

Ellie Clarke

In 2018 the Trump administration signed into law the 'Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017', often referred to as FOSTA.

Fighting sex trafficking is an aim that no right-minded person could disagree with. It's not necessary to explain that sex trafficking (of anyone of any age, but especially minors) is one of the most abhorrent acts on earth. Dig a little deeper, however, and you quickly find this Act is far from what it claims to be. Freedom of expression advocates, sex worker rights advocates and even some anti-human trafficking organisations have been quick to point out this Bill does absolutely nothing to tackle the issue of human trafficking. Instead, it presents a clear danger to the safety of women.

This is because it was never intended to fight sex trafficking. Put simply, the war on human trafficking is a war on prostitution. In fact, the Bill includes the word prostitution as much as it includes reference to sex trafficking victims. Dreamed up by the Christian conservative right and supported by punitive, anti-sex worker "feminists", FOSTA sees all selling of sex, regardless of the agency or consent of the sex workers involved as a form of human trafficking. The Act targets activities as broad as offering or soliciting paid sex, to living with a sex worker.

One of the most devastating effects of this act though, is that it makes it a felony to "promote or facilitate" prostitution. This means that online channels, such as back page, Craig's List and Reddit, which sex workers have been using for years to advertise, have removed all their classified sec-



Sex workers in London protest a similar bill proposed by the UK government, July 2018 ([Juno Mac](#))

tions. Even though FOSTA is a piece of American legislation, the Act is having ramifications for sex workers across the world.

Increased danger

Classified ads give sex workers the opportunity to communicate with and screen clients before meeting them in person. These sites also allowed sex workers to communicate with each other, creating and sharing online blacklists of dangerous clients. FOSTA has managed to make an already dangerous profession exponentially more so overnight. Anti-sex trafficking organisations have also pointed out, all the Bill actually achieves in regards to sex trafficking is driving it further underground and making victims harder to reach.

On top of this, it has dried up the online client base and forced women back to the dangers of selling sex on the streets. The people profiting most from all this are pimps. Women are left with little choice but to capitulate to dangerous third party precursors, making them more at risk of exploitation and trafficking.

Much like the war on drugs, the war on sex trafficking is a faux-cru-

sade designed to whip up a moral panic against the vulnerable people it claims to protect. The justification for this crusade is based on highly dubious, unsubstantiated data. There is no evidence that sex trafficking is on the rise in the US. In fact, due to its very nature we have absolutely no idea how many victims of sex trafficking there are across the world at any given time.

According to a 2015 article in *Reason* magazine – The Government Accountability Office (GAO) described the Department of Homeland Security's figures on sex trafficking as "questionable", citing "methodological weaknesses, gaps in data, and numerical discrepancies...the U.S. government's estimate was developed by one person who did not document all his work." Going on the article explains, "even if he had, there would still be good reasons to doubt the quality of the data, which was compiled from a range of nonprofits, governments, and international organizations, all of which use different definitions of trafficking."

In the same year Glenn Kessler of the Washington Post used his fact-

checker article to debunk the often used statistic that 300,000 children are "at risk" of sexual exploitation in the US. This is a claim used over and over again by proponents of the Act in both the Senate and Congress. However, they are baseless figures that have been denounced by the Crimes against Children Research Centre at the University of New Hampshire.

Kessler explains "the 300,000 figure comes from a 2001 report written by Richard J. Estes and Neil Weiner of the University of Pennsylvania. So the study relied on data from the 1990s... That should be an immediate red flag.

The report suggested that about 326,000 children were "at risk for commercial sexual exploitation," but this was a somewhat nebulous term that did not necessarily mean the children were forced into prostitution. The researchers started by compiling the number of youths in 14 different categories, such as foreign children, children in public housing or female gang members. But many of these categories could overlap, such a female, foreign-born child in public housing who was part of a gang. That one person would count as three.

The study also made a series of assumptions that simply were not scientifically sound. A problem the researchers themselves were quick to point out.

Unfortunately, facts matter little in the face of a mass hysteria that is capable of furthering political gain and diverting a mindboggling amount of federal funds into law enforcement channels. We saw how this exact pattern played out with the war on drugs. We all now know the devastating human cost of that war. Generations of lives and entire communities were ripped apart and decimated. The police were militarised and the state was handed powers so draconian they would shock Orwell. The war on drugs ushered in the age of mass incarceration and created the perfect conditions for one of the most profitable industries in the world: the prison

industrial complex.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, as of 2019 around 1.5 million people were serving a custodial sentence. In 2013, 716 per 100,000 of the national population was locked up in prison. Of the people locked up today, 176,300 were imprisoned for drug related offences. According to market research conducted by IBISWorld in 2014, private correctional facilities were a \$4.8 billion industry that year, with profits of \$629 million. This is before we even begin to consider the amount of money states make off prisoners by using them as free labour.

Profitting from vulnerability

The war on drugs did nothing to curtail the drug trade, but it did achieve one thing extremely well: it made the oppressors, be they cartel bosses or for-profit prison operators, astronomically rich off the backs of some of the most vulnerable sections of the working class. The war on prostitution (let's call it what it is) will be no different.

The public opinion on the war on drugs is slowly beginning to shift. Younger people tend to be far more liberal about drug use and far more aware of the failures of criminalisation. This in turn is starting to influence a relaxation in drug laws. The same is not true for sex work. Despite being the oldest (and I'd hazard a guess, most sought-after) profession in the world, prostitution still has the

ability to illicit a strong reaction from people. Add child exploitation into the mix and you can quickly get a perfect storm of fraught emotions and dangerous legislation.

Prohibitionist laws are always enforced more heavily in communities that are already marginalised and over policed. In 2018, black males accounted for 34% of the total male prison population and Hispanic males 24%. This is despite the fact black people only represent around 13% of the US population and Hispanic people 18%. Sex work is a part of every walk of life but sex workers of colour, trans sex workers and people who work the streets are much more likely to face harassment, assault, arrest and robbery at the hands of the police. These are the people who bear the brunt of the war on prostitution. 'High class' escorts with well-established client lists, respectable business models and indoor premises will be mostly sheltered from it. This is especially perverse considering these are the people who can most afford legal counsel and the limited protections offered inside the criminal justice system. Rich business men with the means to conduct their dates in restaurants and nice hotel rooms will also be sheltered from laws aimed at clients.

There are around 219,000 incarcerated women in the US according to a 2018 report by the Prison Policy Initiative. This is eight times higher than the number recorded in 1980 and it's



A Minneapolis protest against the raid and arrests at Backstage, a classified ads site used by sex workers to screen clients. The site's owner was charged with pimping and conspiracy under FOSTA

no secret that the vast majority of these women are black or brown and/or live below the poverty line. These women are subject to horrific abuse at the hands of the state. Male prison officers have ultimate control over female prisoners who are completely reliant on them for basic necessities. They can beat, degrade and even sexually abuse the women in their charge, seemingly with impunity.

As Angela Davis states in *Women, war and resistance: Front line feminism*

"the sexual abuse of women in prison is one of the most heinous state-sanctioned human rights violations within the United States

today. Women prisoners represent one of the most disenfranchised and invisible adult populations in our society. The absolute power and control the state exercises over their lives both stems from and perpetuates the patriarchal and racist structures that, for centuries, have resulted in the social domination of women"

The inevitable swell in street work since 2018 has been met with more arrests, raids, harassment and custodial sentencing. Yes, sex trafficking is a very real problem that needs to be combated, but FOSTA does nothing to address it. Instead it pushes women into further danger at the hands of

pimps, clients and – perhaps worst of all – the police, all the while feeding the insatiable poverty-to-prison pipeline and perpetuating the prison industrial complex.

If we are going to have any hope of tackling sex trafficking then we need solutions that get to the root of the problem, not hyperbolic moral crusades against the sex industry. If we have learned nothing else from the war on drugs, surely we have learned by now that criminalising entire industries achieves nothing except pushing those industries further into the hands of the most unscrupulous people on earth.

A NEW GENERATION OF KYRGYZ HEROINES

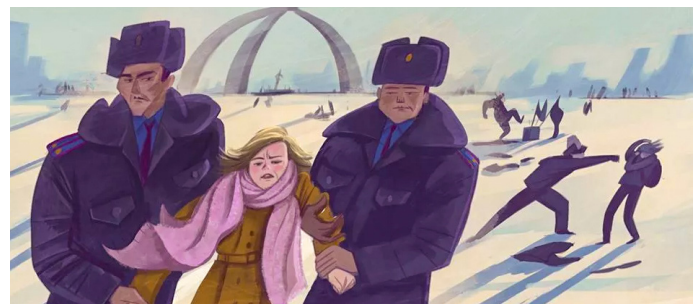
Katie Dollar

The kidnapping of brides has been banned for decades in Kyrgyzstan, an ex-USSR Central Asian Republic lying north of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The law was tightened in 2013, with sentences of up to 10 years in prison for those who kidnap a woman to force her into marriage. Previously it was a fine of 2,000 soms, about £20.

Despite that, the medieval practise of *ala kachuu* ("take and run") persists to this day. The [Women Support Centre](#) in Bishkek has estimated that [12,000 forced marriages](#) take place every year and very few perpetrators are convicted.

About 80% of the girls kidnapped accept their fate, often on the advice of their parents. It is estimated that 2,000 women are raped by their future husbands each year, and are condemned to marry as a result, because returning to their family would be a deep mark of shame. Fleeing brides also risk further violence and even death. Aizada Kanatbekova, 27, was found strangled to death two days after being snatched off the street by five men. The kidnapping took place in daylight in the centre of Bishkek (the capital city). Kanatbekova's mother said police had laughed off her plea for help after the abduction and told her she'd soon be dancing at her daughter's wedding.

In 2018, a woman was murdered and mutilated whilst seeking help in a police station. The victim, Burulai Turdaaly Kyzy, a 20-year-old medical student, was killed by the man who had kidnapped her. He stabbed her, then carved her initials and those of another man she had planned to marry on to the woman's body. The officers had left the two of them alone in the waiting room, though she had made



[Tatyana Zelenskaya](#) depicts her own arrest at a women's march in 2020

charges against him. A feminist activist has developed a successful video game for mobile phones that aims to convince young people that kidnapping is not a tradition but a crime. Despite the country's poverty, it has [134](#) mobile phone accounts per 100 people (it was 10 per 100 in 2005). [Tatyana Zelenskaya](#) designed the game's graphics, working with the human rights organisation Open Line Foundation, which supports victims of bride kidnapping through counselling and legal advice,

Developers had hoped for 25,000 downloads. In just over six months, the app has already been downloaded more than 130,000 times. In the game, players witness the kidnapping of a best friend and must free her, while messages with suggestions prepared by psychologists, journalists and activists appear on the screen, as well as real telephone numbers that can be used in an emergency.

"The idea is to make the girls understand that they are masters of their own destiny. This is why we transform them into heroines capable of rebelling and changing the course of things," said Zelenskaya. "For a generation of women who grew up with the idea that nothing is possible without a man's approval, unhinging this concept is difficult."

EDUCATING WOMEN, CHANGING MINDSETS

Sarah Morgan

According to [UNESCO](#) estimates, globally, 132 million girls are out of school, including 34.3 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67.4 million of upper-secondary school age. UNICEF reports 15 million of those girls come from the East Asia/Pacific region.

Every fifth girl in the region was unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 according to 2020 figures. The pandemic has also caused increases in gender-based violence, early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

One way of pushing for increased education for girls is through projects such as PAWA, which focuses on empowering teenage girls through education and social projects. They operate a number of projects in India, Nepal, Cambodia, Malaysia and Pakistan.

In the last two years PAWA has worked with Nepalese underprivileged families, in a project where girls are selected for academic and social achievement. Though there are some public schools in Nepal, PAWA says standards are very low. For very poor families there is no alternative to private education. PAWA help with fees, but as such, they are limited in how many girls they can support.

In Nepal there is a very high rate of girls being sold off for marriage and there is a lot of child trafficking. Ze-



A PAWA sponsored food donation to Thailand during the pandemic ([@PAWALondon](#))

han from PAWA said, "We're really trying to demonstrate to these families that girls have a value too. And most girls actually contribute back to their families and their communities... Then the families don't see them as someone to sell off or pass on or marry off."

PAWA is doing similar work in India through Karuna Trust, a Buddhist organisation. As in Nepal, changing mindsets is what they have tried to do for the last six years – to get families to allow girls to attend school.

Early marriage

Early marriage is a big problem in India because girls are often seen as property. Many young girls are raped in rural areas, which is one of the reasons they don't want to send girls to school. In 2018 there were 33,000 reports of rapes, more than 93 per cent of which were committed by someone known to the victim. It's sometimes said to be for the security of the girls to marry them off young, before anything happens to them. The BJP government has pledged to crackdown on this crime, but it is, unsurprisingly, still on the rise.

PAWA asserts that education is key because educated women are more aware of the dangers and risks involved in being a woman, as well as having a better understanding of birth control options.

Banani has been with Nishtha since she was a small girl, she

comes from a very poor background, with her father being an agricultural labourer. She studied hard and was supported by Nishtha all through school and beyond, she got a scholarship and has now graduated with a masters in Bengali from the University of Kolkata. This is the first time any girl in the project has reached this level of education, and everyone is delighted. Banani now wants to study to become a teacher, and meanwhile is offering free tuition classes to girls in her locality.

"I have got Nishtha besides me since I was a child and it was Nishtha who presented me the opportunity to be what I am today. We come from a family where thinking about studying or completing it is absolutely a day dream. But it has become true only because of Nishtha. Nishtha has taught us how a girl can change the world through education. If a girl stands on her own feet, she can do any good thing she wants."

The pandemic has affected all of PAWA's projects in Asia. Schools have had to close in both Nepal and India. PAWA have been trying to keep girls engaged online, but many families don't have online learning equipment. PAWA has sent extra Covid aid, including food parcels and hygiene kits.

• pawa-london.org





SUPPORT AFGHAN WOMEN AGAINST THE TALIBAN

Jayne Evans

Following the announcement that almost all foreign troops would leave Afghanistan by September, the Taliban has made rapid territorial gains. Within a month they had taken Kabul and on Saturday 11th September (at the time of writing), had raised their flag over the presidential palace to mark the beginning of the newly formed Islamic emirate.

Tens of thousands of Afghans, who fear Taliban reprisals, have tried to flee the country and thousands have headed to the airport to get on flights out of the country. However, now, the borders are largely closed.

Workers' Liberty has never supported the US and allied military presence in Afghanistan. Unlike many on the left, however, we do not ignore or downplay the threat that the Taliban poses to democracy and workers' rights, and particularly the threat it poses to women.

When the Taliban were in power from 1996-2001 there were many restrictions, but the treatment of women was particularly brutal, and especially in the cities.

- Women were forced to wear the burqa when in public.
- Women were not allowed to work except for some minor exemptions.

- Girls could not be educated after the age of 8.
- Women were not allowed to drive.
- Women couldn't be treated by a male doctor unless accompanied by a male chaperone.
- The wearing of nail varnish or make-up was prohibited.
- Forced marriages of under-age girls increased.
- Women were not allowed to appear on TV or radio or at public gatherings of any kind.

*"This is not a victory
for 'anti-imperialism'
as some on the left
would have us believe"*

The punishments received for violation of rules varied in severity. Women had the tips of their fingers cut off for wearing nail varnish. Other mutilations reported included a young woman having nose and ears cut off for fleeing a family she was "promised" to. Public lashings for not wearing the correct dress, and public stonings, were frequent. There were public executions at the former football stadium in Kabul.

As well as official punishments, taxi drivers and shopkeepers were used to

apply pressure on families to conform to rules. Husbands and fathers would be punished if women in the household didn't obey rules.

In addition to the physical punishments, the forced confinement and fear of attack resulted in increased stress, anxiety, and depression.

Amnesty reports that since 2001, despite women's rights in Afghanistan still being the sixth worst in the world, there were some improvements.

Women's participation in public life increased. Women made up 20% of civil servants. 3.5 million girls were enrolled in school. Thousands of women were working in education, and some women were able to go to university. Two million girls still had no access to education and violence against women was extremely high. However, the Taliban poses a threat even to the limited gains made since 2001.

Over the last month, despite initially saying women will still have some rights, they have begun to make it clear what their rule will mean for women. Women are no longer visible in most areas of public life. Most women have been told to stay home for "security reasons". Women no longer feel safe to leave their home while Taliban soldiers patrol the streets. The Taliban have now announced that traditional

Islamic dress and the wearing of the hijab will be compulsory. Boys and girls will not be taught together, and female students will only be taught by women. They have said that they intend for some women to be able to return to work once workplaces can be segregated but already universities, for example, are saying that it won't be financially possible for them to finance and staff a segregated system.

Anti-imperialism

For many years we have argued that the longer the US stayed the worse would be the prospects for working-class and democratic forces when they inevitably withdrew. This seems to be confirmed by the rapidity with which the Taliban were able to take back power. But opposing the US is not enough.

This is not a victory for “anti-imperialism”, as some on the left would have us believe. A left which thinks that we should just oppose the US government and its allies, and not oppose the Taliban too, is of no use to those who are fighting to build a movement that can replace both.

We hope that the young population of Afghanistan are able to resist the Taliban in the cities, that the limited improvements in living standards and women's rights have given some room for opposition to build. The big factor that can change the balance of forces could be a working-class and democratic upheaval in Pakistan, cutting off the Taliban from its nurturing hinterland. Reactionary forces in the area will also be strengthened, however. Trade revenue and humanitarian aid will also fall leading to an increase in poverty that will undoubtedly hit women hardest.

Our hope for the future lies not with the ruling class in the US, Britain, China or Russia but in the international working class. We will look for opportunities to organise solidarity with any democratic, women's, trade union or progressive organisations that are able to organise.

A FEMINIST SPEAKS FROM INSIDE KABUL

Mariam

Mariam is an activist in the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), living in Afghanistan.

Women's demonstrations started in the first week of full Taliban rule, particularly in Herat and Kabul and other cities. In these cities at least, women previously had some basic rights, like having jobs and going to school and university. These were small demonstrations, mostly dozens rather than many hundreds or thousands. But they took place in a lot of places, and that showed the power and strength that women in Afghanistan have. Some were attacked by the Taliban.

A lot of those demonstrating were women employees, especially government employees, who are being prevented from going to work. Often these women are the sole breadwinners for their families; there are a large number of widows in Kabul and other areas. Without these jobs they cannot feed their children.

Meanwhile primary schools are being strictly segregated and girls excluded from secondary schools.

Of course, before this, women in Afghanistan did not enjoy a lot of rights; it was a very male-dominated society. The Taliban are much, much worse. Largely you don't even see women on the streets now. If they are out it is in the burqa. But Afghan women are not the same as 20 years ago. They have learnt a lot. This was not because of the US presence in Afghanistan. It is because 20 years is a long time and this generation who have had some basic rights want to try to keep them. The old government was not a democracy, it was a corrupt and rotten regime. But at the same time many women went to school and work and saw things



Afghan women, including RAWA members protest the Taliban ([@RealRAWAacct](https://twitter.com/RealRAWAacct))

could be different. They don't want to experience what their mothers experienced under the first period of the Taliban.

The Taliban have not become more modern, let alone democratic. It is absolutely in their nature that they are reactionary fundamentalists. It would be foolish to expect any positive changes from them. They say they are not against women's rights, but listen to what they actually say, that women's rights must come under sharia law. Sharia law is itself incompatible with the rights of women. The very best we could end up with is something like Iran, a deeply misogynistic regime. Very likely it will be much worse.

Some of us in RAWA have some experience from the first period of Taliban rule, when we documented executions, beatings and the oppression of women. We will do that again. We will continue our fight, with patience and determination. It will be more difficult than before and we will not be as strong. We will have to see what is possible and how we need to adapt.

We have always taken a lot of strength from international support — not from governments or mainstream organisations but from freedom- and justice-loving people around the world.

- From a longer interview with Mariam — see bit.ly/rawainterview



AFGHAN SPORTSWOMEN ABANDONED

Janine Booth

Kelly Lindsey, former head coach of the Afghanistan women's football team – and before that, US international player – spoke to supporters before Lewes FC women's home friendly against West Ham on 22 August. She has been working to secure safe evacuation of footballing women and girls from Afghanistan, along with the director of women's football, a human rights lawyer and FIFPRO (the international professional footballers' federation, their trade union body). "For seven days straight we've created a team in the US, a team in Australia, a team in Europe, we have passed the baton all day and all night to try to keep the process going and try to keep the pressure on and try to keep pushing the government and try to keep pushing sports organisations."

Door to door

Lindsey spoke having just heard that some of the girls had been picked up by the Taliban twenty minutes earlier. She explained how they are now operating: "The Taliban have been in the Afghan government for the last twenty years. They've been running ministries, so they have lists of everyone who has been working in the government."

"The Taliban are literally going to houses, literally knocking on doors. One of our families: both the parents were executed, the house was burned down and the girls and one younger brother got out. They were a five-hour drive from Kabul, and they walked from that city to Kabul to try to get onto our transport, because that's the only way to get out. It's desperation – they will do anything to escape. But we won't get everyone out. We have girls in different parts of the country who cannot make it through to Kabul. And we will have to leave them behind, it's gut-wrenching for everyone."

Women and girls playing football has been part of the

progressive expansion of women's activity and rights in Afghanistan following the defeat of the Taliban two decades ago. The return of Taliban rule, following the USA and its allies' ending of their failed military occupation, threatens to undo that progress. Kelly explains that, "When I first got with the team, I asked them why they wanted to play: what is it going to mean to you? What is your purpose in coming together to form this national team? Their first words were: to break the grip of the Taliban, to show women in their country that they could come out of their homes. That was really shocking to me because I didn't really believe that statement about coming out of their homes – but that is truly what the Taliban do. They will lock these women back in their homes, they have already stopped women from working, they've taken education away."

"They can say that they are going to have women's rights within Sharia Law, they're going to give women education, but that's not in our sense of giving women rights and giving women education. Everything will be taken from them, everything that they have worked for. These athletes tried to inspire other women to step out of their homes, go get their education, be the future, create the democracy that they all want, and now they will be the ones who will be persecuted."

"For the status that these athletes have in the country, they are already being targeted. The Taliban have been in their homes, they've already been moving from house to house, living in the streets. We've been pushing and pushing for sports to create equality and empowerment and raise them up and we've done an amazing job. We're raising women up in a desperately insecure country, so for us – for the Americans – to just pull the rug out and walk away, it's just so ... I can't even put it into words. Every government official we talk to is disgusted by the situation,

that we've left so many people behind."

Her frustration with government inaction was clear, as Kelly talked about "pleading" with the governments of the UK, US, Canada, Belgium, Germany and others. "Everyone says 'Yeah, yeah, we want to help', but nobody takes action. That's the killer part right now. You don't have a month to get on it – we're in a tight period."

Sporting bodies

Lindsey is just as frustrated with the sports governing bodies. "We have these huge, global organisations. We've just had a huge Olympics, now the Paralympics. We have two Paralympians in Afghanistan. They have all the money in the world to do this, and yet they are not really doing anything. Why are the world sports governing bodies, which have the capacity, the power, the connections to the government and the money – why are they not stepping up? Why are we using sport for good, but when we really need it, when we say we are a family, when we say we're going to stand together, we don't do anything? Why are the big organisations not coming to the aid of these girls, of these athletes?

"Even the group that we have working on the evacuation, we are working as private individuals. These sports organisations can do more than we can, in a quick amount of time. They can make sure that people can leave the country, get them settled. If you are an athlete, there is nothing better than to know you have a team and a community around you. They need people around them, to help them resettle, to help them have a future and a life.

"We had a huge sexual abuse case that we had to deal with a few years ago, and once again, it took eight months of us begging and pleading to FIFA and other organisations before it was addressed. They always say 'Oh, it's just Afghanistan.' I can't stand those words. It's not just Afghanistan, these are human beings, human lives, futures. The global community has created this situation for them."

She explained the urgent action being taken to help female footballers escape: "The girls who are over eighteen have to go alone. For under-18s, we file applications for family members as well. We've had to keep it quite tight, immediate family only – younger siblings, maybe parents – not the extended family. When they get called into the airport, they will have to say goodbye to their families, maybe for the last time. Their families are all with them, hoping that when the gates open and they are allowed in that maybe they will take somebody else, but it's going to be the most heart-breaking moment for these young players, young women."

The efforts of individuals in the face of governments' inaction means that Lindsey rated the chances of getting the footballers visas and getting them out as "fifty-fifty". She explained that, "Everything is about the documents, and so many women in Afghanistan don't have an ID card,

don't have a passport, don't have the documentation. Elite athletes have documentation because they travel, but they don't have it in their hands because the federations hold on to it. They have an application which means they can get in the airport, that's helping them get on a flight, that doesn't mean they will get a visa. We might have to start pushing that some come to the UK, some go to Canada, some go to Germany, and start splitting and breaking them up. But the key is evacuation, and that was the first key of the strategy, to try to get them in that airport."

Follow the footballers:

Twitter:

- [@shabnammobarez](#) Shabnam Mobarez, Captain of Afghanistan Women's National Team
- [@khalida_popal](#) Khalida Popal, Director of Afghanistan Women's National Team

Instagram:

- [@nadi9nadim](#) Nadia Nadim, who fled Afghanistan with her family after her father was executed by the Taliban in 2000. Plays for the Denmark national team.

RUN

A verse by Janine Booth

Her cover drive and how she ran
are now haram
under the rule of the Taliban

Can she stay in? For sure she can
She can't be out without a man
in ancient, new Afghanistan

She'd tackle assumptions and she'd score
but won't be playing any more
She's fallen foul of holy law

Her parents murdered, house burned down
She grabbed her sisters, fled the town
and walked two hundred miles of ground

To reach a place they might take flight
to wait at the gate and hope despite
the odds that there's an end in sight

While those who gave the battle orders
to storm across a nation's borders
turn their backs on sporting daughters

Instead fall in behind the Man
who wrested back Afghanistan
for the Taliban

TEXAS AND THE FRAGILITY OF REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN THE USA

Katie Dollar

After attempts to block it in the Supreme Court failed, the strictest anti-abortion law in the US went into effect on 1 September 2021.

The [Texas law](#), which bans all abortion after around six weeks, relies on intimidation to ensure it is implemented. It allows any private citizen to sue anyone deemed to have helped a woman get an abortion. Campaigners rightly fear this will empower anti-choice reactionaries to bring harassing lawsuits, paralysing the few abortion clinics still open, in the state.

The law is likely to embolden anti-choice moves in other US states. Other states have passed similar laws, but those measures face legal challenges. The Texas law is the first to be implemented.

For example Mississippi state officials have asked the conservative-majority Supreme Court to overrule *Roe vs Wade* the 1973 decision that established a constitutional right to abortion and thus enable the state to implement a ban on abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

If *Roe vs Wade* is overturned or weakened abortion rights in the US will only be protected (enshrined in state law) in 14 out of the 50 states. Indeed in 22 states laws restricting abortion have already been passed and could be fully implemented. In those states



it is already very difficult to obtain an abortion. Those 22 states represent a huge proportion of the land mass of the USA.

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The US Justice Department said that it will not tolerate violence against anyone seeking abortion services in Texas and that federal officials are exploring all options to challenge this effective ban on almost all terminations.

Given the situation in the US, and a much wider terrifying problem of global attacks on reproductive rights, we cannot rely on legal challenges and the US state department. We need to build a militant pro-choice movement world-wide.

To encourage reporting under the new law, Texas Right to Life has es-

tablished a digital tipline. "Any Texan can bring a lawsuit against an abortionist or someone aiding and abetting an abortion after six weeks," the website reads, and those proved to be violating the law can be fined a minimum of \$10,000. An online form allows anyone to submit an anonymous "report" of someone illegally aiding an abortion, including a section where images can be uploaded for proof.

Pro-choice users on TikTok and Reddit launched an online effort to thwart the law, flooding this tip-website with false reports, Shrek memes and porn. The site, launched a month ago, has crashed several times as a result. One TikTok user said they had submitted 742 fake reports of the governor, Greg Abbott, getting illegal abortions. Others have been writing programs to allow users to mass upload reports.

Our international campaign, must take to the streets, and extend the immediate battle in the US to many other threats to reproductive rights around the world.

- Map showing threat in the US: maps.reproductiverights.org/what-if-roe-fell

