



WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

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

We stand for trans-inclusive, sex-positive, class struggle feminism. We organise in our workplaces and trade unions, and in the student movement and Labour Party for socialist feminist politics.

If you would like to organise with us, or contribute to *Women's Fightback*, please write to us at:
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Edited by Kelly Rogers.

Cover photo: *Housewives with Steak Knives*, 1985, Sutapa Biswas. Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain.

IN THIS ISSUE

Two events of great significance hang over this issue of *Women's Fightback*. One is the 40th anniversary of the miners' strike, which began on 6 March 1984. We cover it extensively, looking back at the role of women in the strike, as well as Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. The other is the ongoing slaughter in Gaza, already one of the worst atrocities of the 21st century. We speak to Rula Daood, a Palestinian woman playing a leading role in Israel's most prominent left organisation, Standing Together. We also reprint a tribute to Vivian Silver, an Israeli feminist and peace activist murdered by Hamas on 7 October last year.

Beyond that, you will find a wealth of cultural criticism; an exhibition on feminist revolt; tales of Unwell Women and Genoa's trans outcasts of the 1960s; dispatches from Mexico's struggle for abortion rights and the fight for democracy in Hong Kong; feminist dissidents in Belarus, and much more. We hope you enjoy it!

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WE BELIEVE IN JOINT STRUGGLE

A NEW LEFT CONFRONTS NETANYAHU AND HAMAS

Rula Daood is National Co-Director of Standing Together, a grassroots movement mobilising Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel in pursuit of peace, equality, and social and climate justice: standing-together.org

Rula spoke to Kelly Rogers.



Rula Daood's first foray into political activism took place in a bakery in the southern coastal city of Ashdod during the 2014 Israel-Gaza war. As the air raid siren sounded, she found herself surrounded by strangers. Picking up a copy of the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, she began to read an article about the situation facing children in Gaza. One of the strangers looked over her shoulder. "I hope they all die", the woman said.

Daood, a Palestinian who grew up in an Arab village in the north of Israel, had come to Ashdod to work as a speech language therapist. Like many Israeli Palestinians of her generation, she did not have a conventional political background ("our parents were the generation that experienced martial law, and we were brought up to be submissive"). Her many experiences of discrimination (when on her way to holiday in Italy after completing her degree, she had been strip-searched at Tel Aviv airport) had not made her an activist.

But in the bakery, something changed. Ashdod is close to Gaza but is 95% Jewish. "I knew I was probably the only Arab in the area, definitely the only one in that bakery." For her own protection, she would normally have remained silent. "But," she says, "there was something within me that just wouldn't take it. So I answered her loudly: 'Shall we go up onto the roof right now and listen to the kids in Gaza screaming and dying – would that make you happy?' And the bakery went quiet. It was like everyone realised the real meaning of what she had said – wishing for kids to die".

THE MASSACRE

That was ten years ago. Daood is now the National Co-Director of Standing Together, Israel's most active social movement organisation, which has found itself at the heart of the anti-war movement. Today's war is far more brutal. The 7 October attacks orchestrated by Hamas killed 1,139 people in southern Israel. The majority were civilians, 36 of them children. A number of kibbutzes were destroyed, around 240 people were taken hostage, and hundreds were massacred at the Re'im music festival. It was the worst terrorist attack in the country's history, and shocked an Israeli public which never believed such an incursion would be possible.

Israel's response to the atrocity has been a war crime of an altogether different scale. Retaliatory bombardments began almost immediately. On 27 October, after mobilising hundreds of thousands of army reservists, the Israeli army invaded Gaza. At the time of writing (in mid-January 2024), it is killing an average of 250 Palestinians a day – more than double the rate of killing in the Syrian civil war. Around 10,000 Palestinian children have been killed in the attacks, and 23,469 overall – roughly 1% of the Gaza Strip's population in just three months. Around a third of Gaza's buildings have been destroyed. A lack of medical supplies means that amputations and caesarean sections are being carried out without anaesthetic. Starvation, cold and disease are taking many lives.

THE LEFT IN DECLINE

The political situation in Israel is grim. Benjamin Netanyahu, who first became Prime Minister in 1996 and has been in power for a majority of the years since then, now leads a coalition government dominated by the far right. Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's Finance Minister and leader of the National Religious Party, has repeatedly claimed that there is "no such thing as a Palestinian people" and has called for Gaza's population to be expelled. Yoav Gallant, the Defence Minister, said in early October: "We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly." Jewish Power is a Kahanist party, an ideology which stands for the creation of a theocratic state. Its leader, Itamar Ben-Gvir, first came to prominence making death threats against liberal Prime Minister Yisak Rabin shortly before he was assassinated, and is now the Minister for National Security.



• Standing Together activists call for a ceasefire, Tel Aviv, December 2023.

"If you look at what's happening now," says Rula Daood, "you don't really have left-wing views in the debate in Israel." The left's vote share has been in free-fall for some time now. In 2022, Meretz, the left-social democratic coalition, failed to meet the 3.25% threshold to get into the Knesset for the first time since it was created in 1992. The Israeli Labour Party – a centrist party whose record on the oppression of the Palestinians is dubious at best – only just scraped in. The Hadash-Ta'al joint list, representing much of the radical left and a sizable chunk of the Palestinian population, remained steady on five seats out of 120.

STRATEGY

Standing Together set out to change this picture. Founded in 2015 by activists from Israel's 2011 protests (which were closely linked to the global Occupy movement), with the help of some of the organised left, the movement aims to mobilise around a series of progressive causes without solidifying into a political party.

"We are the largest movement containing both Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel," says Daood, who joined in 2017 – three years after her confrontation in the Ashdod bakery. And it isn't just about traversing a single ethnic division. "We bring together people at the centre and the

periphery, Ashkenazi [Jews of central and eastern European descent] and Mizrahi [those from the Arab world]. We believe in joint struggle."

As a movement aiming to influence a society that has moved rapidly to the right in recent years, "our slogans might seem very basic," Daood admits, but that might be necessary. Crucial to their strategy is creating a link between bread-and-butter demands of Israeli people and the Palestinian question – the realisation that "everything that's happening here is connected. Only when we get to a point where the Occupation has ended can we have real peace and equality between people – economically, socially."

Many of Standing Together's biggest campaigns have not been directly about the Occupation. In 2018, the group played an important role in organising large protests against deportation of tens of thousands of Sudanese and Eritrean refugees. "We fought that policy, and built solidarity between migrants and the wider community," says Daood. In the context of widespread anger over gentrification in the area, "we talked about how to make south Tel Aviv a better place, not just for asylum seekers but for people who already lived there." Also prominent was their 2022 campaign to raise the minimum

wage, which won the support of dozens of Knesset members and even passed a preliminary reading.

The point of the social movement strategy, says Daood, is to cut against the grain of left decline. "We aren't running for the Knesset – we're focused on building power, because that power has been lost over the past 20 years. When we call out for a demonstration, that will attract much bigger numbers [than a call from a conventional left party] because we have been working with people for eight years on various issues and people see us and recognise us." This model "gives you a much bigger spectrum of support than political parties. As a grassroots movement, you can have people from the far left all the way to the centre, and they can work together on different issues at different times."

Even within this open organising framework, the atmosphere in Israel means that "you have to be careful about what you say, how you say it, and who you affiliate to. People will do things without saying they are part of an organisation." Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Standing Together's strategy is working, at least organisationally. It now claims more than 5,000 paying members.

THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

Its increasing prominence in Israeli society meant that when the current Israel-Gaza war broke out, Standing Together was well placed to play a leading role in the anti-war movement. A factor not often understood by commentators abroad is how widespread and immediate the shock of the October 7th attacks was. "Some of our activists lost people in the Hamas attacks, and others lost people in Gaza", Daood says. For a time after the attacks and during Israel's initial response, understanding and expressing that shared pain was a major part of activity. "But you have to understand the next step: the pain is shared, but what are we going to do now?"

The barriers to organising against the war were and are immense. Israel has a far right, authoritarian government. Emboldened far right groups regularly respond with violence and death threats. "In times of war, people become more extreme," Daood says, understatedly. "Political figures – especially of the centre and right – started talking about wiping out Gaza. One even spoke about dropping an atomic bomb on it. This genocidal rhetoric became the only thing you could hear in the second month of the war."

"We talk about facts. The first fact is that there are two peoples in Israel-Palestine, and they aren't going anywhere. The second fact is that this is not the first Gaza war. We have had 12 wars in 14 years, and nothing has really changed. Every time we hear the same speeches by Bibi – who is still the Prime Minister – saying that this time it will be different, and that he will eradicate Hamas. But Hamas is still there, because Hamas represents an ideology and you can't kill ideas with bombs."

As Daood points out, the Israeli government has previously backed and funded Hamas as a means of splitting the Palestinian leadership and frustrating the cause of Palestinian statehood. Standing Together's case is that this approach is standing it on its head: "you can't have security for Israel if you don't have independence and rights for the Palestinian people. We are talking about a word that is not being used in Israeli politics – we want peace."

FEMINISTS TO THE FRONT

The politics of gender and feminism has immediate relevance in all of this.

"I'll give you a simple example," says Daood. "When we started speaking out against the bombing of Gaza, one of the first things that right wing activists felt comfortable saying to me – alongside the threats to our lives – was that they hoped I got raped."

The response of the Israeli feminist movement to the war has been mixed. Much of it seems focused on the role and equality of women in the army, while omitting any opposition to the war crimes they are committing. "In many parts of Israeli society right now, calls for revenge are much louder than calls for humanity. We should be in a place where we have real solidarity between women in times of war, but it isn't really happening right now."

But things are beginning to change, to some extent. To mark the first 100 days of the war (on the same day we conducted this interview) a collective of women

organised a march in Tel Aviv calling for the release of the hostages and for a ceasefire. "I do believe that the voices who will lead that change will be feminist voices, because we understand the real suffering that happens at times of war."

UK FRIENDS OF STANDING TOGETHER

A network for of activists building practical support and solidarity for Standing Together's work in UK trade unions and community campaigns. The network was launched at a meeting in December 2023, chaired by Labour MP Nadia Whittome.

Sign up for the e-newsletter at:
ukfost.co.uk

A TRIBUTE TO VIVIAN

SAMAH SALAIME

Vivian Silver (1949-2023) was an Israeli peace activist and women's rights activist. She spent much of her life campaigning for Palestinian freedom and an end to the occupation. She was killed during the Be'ere massacre by Hamas on October 7 2023. This tribute was first published on 14 November.

Samah Salaimé is a Palestinian feminist and writer.

The last time I saw Vivian was in Washington, D.C., at an ad-hoc meeting of Palestinian and Israeli activists on the fringes of a conference. We met for a brainstorming session on the difficult question of how to revive our camp – the liberal-left-democratic camp, comprising both Jews and Palestinians – following the catastrophic Israeli election of November 2022 that brought to power the

most far-right government in the country's history. We laughed, jested, and joked, making fun of our situation, but there was great sadness in that room when Vivian said: "I'm too old to establish and build another political body; I have to join what already exists."

"What's nice about being an old and sarcastic retiree is that I can say aloud what I think, and I have nothing to lose," she continued. "Our camp has lost quite a few times; we've taken many hits on the jaw. And I've been through plenty in my own life as well. I've learned a lot, the hard way, about Arab-Jewish partnership, and I know that when it succeeds, it succeeds because every side understands that the justice it seeks depends heavily on the justice of the other side. Closing the gap comes from collaborative work, and not from struggling against one another."

Nothing prepared me for yesterday's bitter news of Vivian's tragic end. I felt deep despair, like a bottomless sink-hole had opened under the foundations of humanity, where thousands are already buried – men, women, children, innocent Palestinians and Israelis. People who had wished for peace, and did not live to see that wish fulfilled.

Already 39 days have passed since that terrible Saturday, October 7. I have read the messages that Vivian and her son sent one another while she was hiding in a

closet from the Palestinian militants who raided Kibbutz Be'eri. It was as though I could feel her heart beating, louder than the tramps of the murderers in her living room.

I tried, a thousand times, to imagine her being taken in their cars into Gaza. "What did she feel during those moments?" I wondered. I thought she might have looked with compassionate tears in her eyes at the dozens of ragged Palestinian children standing on the Gaza roadsides, and she might have prayed for them in her heart. Vivian knew what their lives looked like under Israel's siege, and she would have known what was about to befall them when the Israeli army began its unprecedented assault on the Strip.

"Did you hear those bombs falling where you were?" I thought to myself. Those bombs you hated, because you knew, better than anyone, that they would not bring any sort of solution or security to any of us.

I had convinced myself you were someplace safe, trying to communicate in mangled Arabic with those around you, and trying to explain who you were and what you stood for: a born activist with no reservations. I imagined you comforting the children taken hostage with you, keeping them busy and calming the other women held underground while the earth shook from Israeli airstrikes. The images I had in my mind and the headline I kept imagining – "Peace Activist Released" – will never reach the media. Instead, last

night we read: "Body of Peace Activist from Be'eri Identified."

Until that moment, I did not believe for a minute that you were no longer with us. I was sure you would survive this evil, and would live to tell us about it, even entertain us with stories of the jalabiya you were given to wear – one made for a woman much larger than your tiny frame. Vivian, my dear, we will never have this moment.

AN "IRON SWORD" CAN ONLY KILL

Vivian Silver was born in Winnipeg, Canada in 1949, and immigrated to Israel in 1974. For dozens of years, she was a social activist involved in projects promoting women's rights and advocating for peace. As the co-director of the Arab-Jewish Center for Empowerment, Equality, and Cooperation – Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Economic Development (AJEEC-NISPED), she worked to improve the lives of the Bedouin community in the Naqab/Negev, helping to advance a shared society. She was active in the organization Women Wage Peace, a board member of the human rights group B'Tselem, and a volunteer with The Road to Recovery, which helps transport cancer patients from Gaza to Israeli hospitals.

One of the things she used to say often, which I think sums up her life's philosophy, is: "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail." I told her once: "You know the Palestinian people are not a piece of

wood, not even a piece of metal. We are made of hard rock, so it will be difficult for a hammer in the hands of an idiot to crush us."

Vivian believed in the power of women, and the power of compassion and love – in the completely naïve, simple meaning of these words. She knew, like many of us Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, that the army cannot bring peace, and that an "Iron Sword" – the name the Israeli army has given to its "operation" in Gaza – can only kill. The hammer crushes everything in its path. Even those of us, Palestinians and Israelis, who survive this war will emerge from it crushed by grief.

We'll erect a mourning tent out of misery and regret over the mountain of victims and the destruction that remains. And no "Al Aqsa Flood" – as Hamas named its own October 7 "operation" – will return the thousands of children who lost their lives in Gaza and the south; no flag of victory will fly over Gaza's shores as they are pounded by the bloody waves of Israel's assault.

There above, Vivian, I know you are meeting your friends – among them Eiman, Tofaha, and Maha, Palestinian partners in activism from Gaza. You will be greeted by thousands of other victims, including women who never stopped waging peace, and Palestinians who were murdered by the Israeli military and buried under the rubble while still holding their children as we prayed for their safety.

We are grateful to Samah Salaime for giving us permission to republish her tribute to Vivian in *Women's Fightback*.

• Vivian Silva



MESARVOT

Mesarvot are a youth network in Israel who support conscientious objectors refusing to serve in the Israeli Defence Force.

In December, 18-year old Tal Mitnick became the first refuser since the Israel-Hamas war began. He was sentenced to 30 days in prison. In a statement he said: "I refuse to believe that more violence will bring security. I refuse to take part in a war of revenge"

 [mesarvot](https://www.instagram.com/mesarvot)



LONG READ

• Easington, County Durham. Photograph by Keith Pattison.

WOMEN AND THE MINERS' STRIKE 84-5

KELLY ROGERS

The 1984-5 miners' strike is a moment ripe with lessons and with stories that are devastating and inspiring in equal measure. Among them is the incredible story of the coalfield women.

The women's support movement whirled into action only a few short weeks after the strike began on 6 March 1984. Support groups were set up in every coalfield by local women, predominantly the wives, sisters and daughters of miners. They would keep the strike going for 12 long months.

CLASS

In *Never the Same Again*, published in 1987, Jean Stead wrote about the traditional values held by those in the

mining communities. Although it was not unusual for women to work, the number of women in paid employment was lower in mining areas than elsewhere, and it was generally expected that women would take responsibility for childcare and housework. Stead writes: "In their bones they had always known they were exploited but they knew that at least their exploitation paralleled that of the men they shared their lives with. That is why miners' wives don't, on the whole, take their resentment of the past out on the miners of the present. They complain about their husbands' prejudices but they are setting out to change them, in between looking after the kids and getting the meals ready for the end of the shift." Her point: this new movement wasn't "feminist" in the typical sense. Yes, men were part of the problem, but their situation was also the product of the exploitation of their class.

It was important to the coalfield women to prove that they were behind their men. Most weren't looking to uproot the gender order and were happy to coordinate support behind the scenes, providing food for strikers and their families. As time went on, many women got increasingly involved in more political elements of the strike: organising rallies, speaking to press, and picketing. But here too, a

normative gender politics played out; women turning up to picket lines with banners and placards in support of the "real men" out on strike, and condemning the strikebreakers ("scabs"), who they believed had forfeited their masculinity by crossing picket lines. What a sad state of affairs, they said, that these men needed *women* to put them in their place.

Support for the strike was not universal. Many women were anxious about the cost it would bring to their families. It followed several months of an NUM-directed overtime ban, and many households were already struggling to make ends meet. Antipathy towards Arthur Scargill was widespread amongst miners' wives as a result. But a strong collective culture prevailed in the mining communities and, regardless of one's views on the strike, for most people crossing a picket line was inconceivable. Many coalfield women came from mining families and their loyalty to the union ran deep.

POLITICAL WOMEN

In their new book *Women and the Miners' Strike 1984-1985*, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson note that politically-experienced women led the women's support groups in many places. In some areas, such as Chesterfield in Derbyshire, support groups grew out of

existing political networks. Here, Betty Heathfield, member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and wife of Peter Heathfield, NUM General Secretary, set up a group to canvas for Tony Benn in the Chesterfield by-election in February 1984. A few weeks later it was only natural that the same group would meet in support of the miners' strike. Women who were active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or who were trade unionists in their own right also took the lead.

The women in Barnsley, Arthur Scargill's hometown, were among the first to organise. In May, they held a national women's march through the town, ending with a rally in Barnsley Civic Hall. Against all expectations, more than 10,000 women turned up. Jean Miller was a political activist in the Barnsley support group, and she described the day: "This was truly the most electrifying experience of my life. The atmosphere was tremendous. There were so many women in there it felt as though the floor was going to collapse." Maureen Douglas, from Doncaster Miners' Support Committee, spoke from the platform: "The traditional role of women has been dealt a serious blow by the last eight weeks... It's a new experience – we've had to start from scratch and form our own organisations. It's daunting, but it's been done."

The day marked a turning point in the movement. From that day on, the women's groups built a national network, organising together. It was the Barnsley rally that inspired the formation of National Women Against Pit Closures, officially inaugurated three months later in August 1984.

FOOD AND FUNDS

The women had to overcome significant barriers getting their support groups up and running. In South Kirby, Yorkshire, they used a tent without running water to prepare 570 meals a day. But in spite of these challenges, they were able to co-ordinate kitchens and food parcels on a Herculean scale. The Swansea, Neath and Dulais Valleys support group in Wales were producing approximately 400 food parcels a week in May 1984, 900 a week in July, and over 1,000 in late December. In Hatfield, Yorkshire, the support group was serving 300 dinners a day at the miners' welfare by June; by November, they were making 500 dinners a day and sending out 700 food parcels each week.

The support groups were also raising funds, both to pay for their activities and to redirect back into the union's fighting fund. This took many women out of their villages, as they travelled across the country and internationally to speak at meetings and rallies.

Between July 1984 and September 1985, National Women Against Pit Closures raised over £710,000 (almost £3 million in today's money). In London, around £40,000 a month was raised through the official London NUM Support Committee, and this figure doesn't account for many of the countless local fundraising efforts. Money was also raised through a twinning scheme, where support groups outside of the mining communities, trade union branches or political groups would "adopt a pit". *Women's Fightback* put out a call to local Fightback groups and Women's Sections in the Labour Party to do just this.

SPEAKING UP

When the women's support groups began to garner attention from the press, they were often portrayed as traditional and simple. It was a compelling narrative: downtrodden housewife-turned-activist. This annoyed some of the coalfield women, who were, by and large, educated, articulate and more than capable.

That said, a huge number of accounts speak to how personally transformative the strike was, especially when it came to speaking in public. Women threw themselves into collective study, discussing politics and debating union business. They did this so effectively that many of their husbands were taken by surprise when they took to the platform. Doreen Hamber, from Blidworth in Nottinghamshire, spoke about her experience: "I was really going on and getting carried away. They kept pushing notes in front of me which said 'shut up now', 'shut up now', but I didn't even see the notes; I was just carried away. When I finished and came off the stage, my husband came up to me and gave me a kiss. He said, 'That speech was fantastic'. It amazed him that I could stand up there and speak politics. So all those things that I've gone out and learned; it took a meeting for him to attend to listen to me speaking to realise how I'd come forward in eight months."

PICKETING

Some strikers had reservations about women picketing. As well as being worried about their safety, some believed that women would escalate tensions between strikers and police. But many women were determined to show their support in the most direct way possible, by standing with their men on the picket line.

In some cases, women began picketing almost by accident. In an interview conducted for *Women's Fightback*,

• Easington, County Durham. Photograph by Keith Pattison.



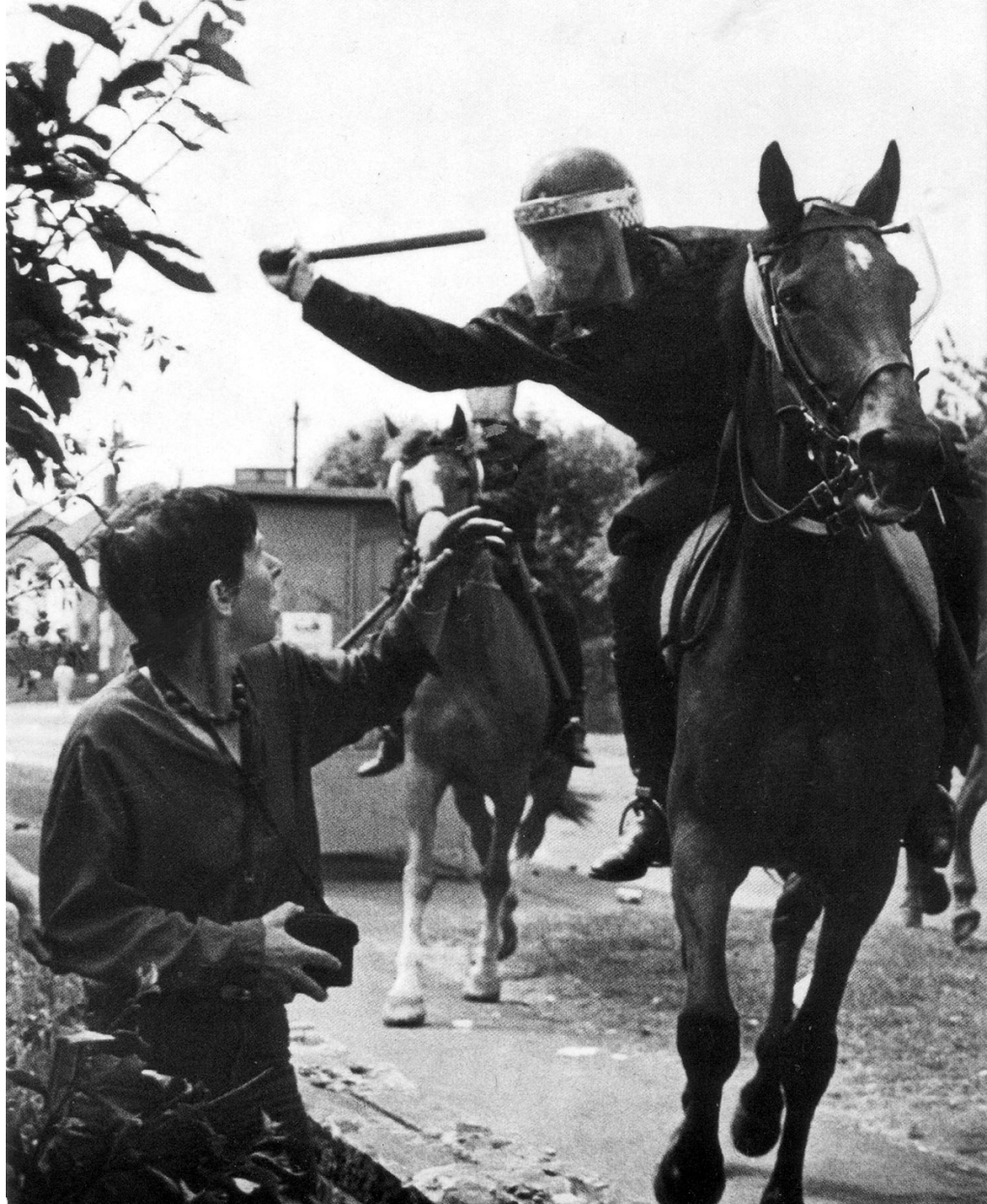
Sheila Jow from Thurnscoe in Yorkshire described one such occasion in April 1984. A group of women had travelled to Ollerton in Nottinghamshire to speak to the wives of miners who were breaking the strike. They wanted to convince the women, who they believed could then persuade the men, that striking wasn't as difficult as it might first seem. While there, they met with the wives of striking miners too, who were setting up a kitchen and asked for some help. So they returned to Thurnscoe, rallied some extra hands, and a few days later headed back down to Ollerton. When they reached the outskirts of Nottinghamshire they were stopped by police, who blocked their bus and threatened to arrest them. Jow said: "we decided that if the police were going to treat us like flying pickets, we might as well be flying pickets... So we walked to Harworth pit, three miles away." There were only a few strikers picketing, who were delighted to be joined by more than 35 Thurnscoe women, escorted by a cordon of more than a hundred police officers.

The women's support groups also organised women-only pickets. On the evening of 11 October, 150 women set up a picket line outside Florence Colliery in the West Midlands. The action brought together women from all over the region, who had decided to target the pit because of the larger-than-usual number of strikebreakers. Writing for *Women's Fightback* at the time, Jill Mountford said: "It was decided that the whole evening would be treated as a celebration... The fun began as soon as the women got to the gates. Non-stop singing, dancing and jeering generated energy, confidence and solidarity." They successfully turned away three strikebreakers that evening.

Women pickets were treated extremely violently by police. They were dragged, pushed and punched. They were arrested and harassed while in detention. Aggie Currie was arrested after picketing in Nottinghamshire and recalled: "they do clobber you, they don't give a shit whether you be male or female." This was perhaps best captured by the now famous photo of Sheffield WAPC member, Lesley Boulton, who was attacked by a mounted policeman wielding a baton at the Battle of Orgreave in June 1984.

NATIONAL WOMEN AGAINST PIT CLOSURES

The inaugural conference for NWAPC was held in July 1984 in Barnsley. Approximately 50 women from across the different support groups attended.



• Lesley Boulton at the Battle of Orgreave, June 1984. Photograph by John Harris.

A smaller "inner circle" met with Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield beforehand to discuss the direction of the organisation. The NUM leaders were keen to ensure that "anti-Scargillites" in the Eurocommunist faction of the CPGB (Scargill was close to the Stalinist wing of the party) wouldn't be able to take up any positions of influence. This divide would last the duration of the strike, with Scargill keeping the organisation on a short leash.

The "Scargillites" were keen to limit membership to miners' wives to minimise outside political influence. Others wanted to build a movement that drew on the strength of the trade unionists, socialists and feminists that were signing up to help. At the November conference in Chesterfield, only three delegates were not miners' wives. Two of them, Ella Egan and Ida Hackett, both Eurocommunists, argued for "links with the peace movement and progressive women's organisations". They hoped that building a "popular front" along

these lines would bolster the strike, while reshaping working class politics to be more inclusive of feminist and other social movements. Betty Heathfield opposed them, holding the Scargill line: the sole priority of NWAPC was supporting the strategies of the NUM. Heathfield and the other Scargill supporters won the debate, but tensions continued in lots of local groups. In some cases, as in Barnsley, support groups split over questions like these.

GREENHAM COMMON

Feminism was sometimes a controversial topic in the pit villages. One woman, interviewed just after the strike by Betty Heathfield, associated feminism with being anti-family: "We've met a lot of feminists and we've been insulted by a lot of feminists. Not that they meant to insult us, but we still want to be married women. We still want to love our husbands. Love our kids."



Nevertheless, important links were made with the wider women's movement. In the summer of 1984, coaches were hired to take women from the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp to the picket lines in Wales and Nottinghamshire. Stead described these visits: "They would arrive at support centres unexpectedly and on impulse, in the way they did most things. A group would suddenly appear at a miners' welfare club... smelling of woodsmoke. They would then start to talk. Anxious as they were not to intrude into the intensely private world of mining communities, they were nevertheless determined to help if they possibly could." The Greenham women produced their own badge – "At Greenham or on the picket line" – and they spent the rest of the summer picketing alongside miners and their families. Women from the mining communities visited Greenham Common in return, and bonds of solidarity and friendship burgeoned between the two camps.

But there were profound political disagreements. Greenham was a peace camp and the women argued with the miners, calling for non-violence on the picket lines – a position that was met with incredulity. The miners were facing daily battles with heavy-handed police. Non-violence wasn't an option. In a few cases, the Greenham women convinced miners to stage sit-in protests, but these experiments proved to be disastrous. Lynn Clegg described an attempted sit-in at Hatfield in Yorkshire in August 1984: "The

• March on Parliament, 1984. Photograph by Maggie Murray, founding member of women's photography collective Format Photographers, established in 1983. Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain.

lads got battered to bits... [They] didn't even have a chance to see or get up. The police went in with batons, just hitting anybody and one lad was put in intensive care. It was the worst day we ever had at Hatfield."

SCABS

In Nottinghamshire over 27,000 miners broke the strike. It was the defining battle of the dispute: miners against miners. For the duration of the strike, miners from elsewhere would travel to picket the Nottinghamshire pits. Thousands of highly trained, semi-militarised police were sent in to terrorise these "flying pickets" and the local strikers.

Those that did strike, and the women that supported them, had a difficult time of it. Nottinghamshire women were forced to occupy welfare centres to get their kitchens up and running. At Clipstone Colliery a group of women took over a youth centre owned by the National Coal Board. Elsie Lowe, one of the occupation's leaders, described the situation at the time: "People were getting hungry. There were getting on for 1,000 people we knew about who literally hadn't anything to eat... We knew we had to do something." After a six-night occupation the trustees agreed to give them some space and they were moved to the St John's Ambulance centre,

where there was only one old and dirty oven. "The first thing we did was to clean that cooker!"

In some ex-mining villages divisions are still sorely felt. The strikers in Nottinghamshire faced extraordinary violence at the hands of the police, who had placed the villages under siege. Police cars roamed the streets day and night, with officers beating up pickets at random and forcing their way into striking miners' houses to arrest them. John Lowe, husband of Elsie Lowe, was arrested while sitting on the grass outside his pit: "I had six police on to me at once, yet I was charged with hitting two policemen and actual bodily harm."

A group of women went from Nottinghamshire to the women's march in Barnsley in May 1984. They described feeling guilty at first: "People seemed to think we were all scabs, they didn't realise how many were on strike in the county." But before long they were being heralded as heroes, and they were placed in a prominent position in the middle of the march. They proudly went through Barnsley singing, "Notts are here! Notts are here!" It was a welcome reward for the sacrifices and trials they had struggled through back at home.

THE NUM

In June 1984, Jean McCrindle, from Sheffield WAPC, wrote to the *Sunday Times* calling for an associate NUM membership for women from the support groups. Both the Yorkshire NUM and the union more widely were, in the majority, against the idea, but it proved an important debate. Even when it came to running kitchens, women were often hemmed in by the union. In Hetton, Durham, the women insisted on a meeting to agree the activities of the group. It was a demeaning experience: "The women had to sit on the stairs, waiting for the men to decide to give them permission to serve them in soup kitchens." In Woolley Edge, near Barnsley, Betty Crook had a similar experience. In her interview for *Women and the Miners' Strike*, she recalls having to be forceful to get her way: "I got summoned to a meeting at the miners' welfare with the union men, and it set off first of all that we couldn't have a soup kitchen. I said, 'of course we can'. 'You've nowhere to have it.' I said, 'we have.' 'You've got no cutlery or crockery,' I said 'we've got everything we need.' You can't have a soup kitchen.' I said, 'it's going ahead'."

One might wonder why local NUM branches would act in this way. In some instances it was straightforward sexism; they believed women should stay at home and out of union matters. But the women also had the union rattled. Stead writes: "The women noticed that they themselves had been quicker at starting things, getting things done, having ideas, and putting them into practice... The men were slower and more conservative, not so inspired. That is why they have been frightened of letting the women anywhere near the union."

There were some women NUM members who worked in pit canteens, as cleaners or as office workers. For these women, getting involved in the union was often alienating. Stead tells the story of Alfreda Williamson, an 18-year old striking canteen worker. At 4 o'clock every morning she would make tea in the welfare hall, before joining the picket line at the gates of Murton Colliery in Durham. Later, she would head back to the welfare hall to make tea, before doing the washing up. "We were working a lot harder than the men, and I told a few of them that and all, when they used to come and complain," she said. She asked to join the other strikers on the NUM bus to the picket line, and to be let off making the tea, but the union wouldn't agree. Despite this,

she fought hard to convince other NUM canteen workers to stick with the strike, a battle she often lost: "In their own minds, the ones who went back did so because the union never bothered about them."

THE STRIKE ENDS

The conference that decided to end the strike took place on 3 March 1985. A narrow vote – 98 delegates to 91 – sent the miners back to work after hours of tense debate. The fall out was bitter. 10,000 miners had been arrested during the strike and hundreds imprisoned. More than a thousand had been dismissed. Several coaches of sacked Scottish miners met the delegates as they left Congress House. One shouted, as Scargill confirmed the results: "We've given you our hearts, we've given you blood, we've given you everything and then you sell us out... You're tarred and feathered with

the rest of the scabby bastards." He then began to weep.

The women were just as devastated. Earlier in the strike, Sheila Jow had spoken to *Women's Fightback* and said: "We'll eat grass before we go back. The fight has got to be to the finish." It was a sentiment that had been repeated thousands of times in meetings and rallies across the country. In her 1987 retrospective, Jean Stead writes: "Almost universally the women were against the miners going back to work. They had not suffered a whole year's privations and hardship to give in then... But, in the final analysis, they had no vote and no real voice."

The miners marched back to work beneath union banners. In many places, the women's support groups took their place at the front.

• Picket of Yorkshire Main Colliery. Photograph by John Sturrock.



A week after the fatal vote, Ian McGregor, chairman of the National Coal Board, declared: "People are now discovering the price of insubordination and insurrection. And boy, are we going to make it stick." Thousands of jobs were lost in the first few months after the strike had ended. By 1991 only 15 out of 174 pits remained, with 160,000 jobs lost.

The situation for the mining families was dire: debts had piled up over the duration of the strike, and bills, rents and mortgages which had been frozen now needed to be paid. The women's support groups kept going in some places for another two years to help.

REMEMBERING THE STRIKE

In 1985 North Yorkshire WAPC produced a booklet, *Strike 84-5*. In the foreword they wrote: "In the coalfields, there is a new breed of women who are only as old as the strike, who have won the admiration of people the world over. They have fought not behind their men but shoulder to shoulder with them. When histories of the strike are written, all will agree that the women are glorious."

This reproduces a common, quite condescending narrative: before the strike the miners' wives were backwards and simple, but they were transformed by it. It brushes over the countless leaders inside the mining communities who built the support movement from the ground up, as well as the trade unionists, socialists and feminists who shared their knowledge and spent a year building perhaps the most impressive solidarity effort the country has ever seen.

But it is true that the women did more than just "stand behind their men". They

became leaders in the strike. Many in the NUM wanted to ensure the women remained auxiliaries to the union, providing food and funds but staying out of politics. In the end, many became the decision-makers in their household, ensuring their men held the line. They toured the country, and travelled abroad, to speak at meetings and rallies and they fought their own political battles to decide the strategies for their movement. Without their effort, the miners could never have struck for so long.

The lines of the class war were laid bare by the miners' strike. Thatcher's government set out to destroy one of the best organised industries in the country, and in succeeding set the stage for the deregulated, rampantly unequal society we live in today. 40 years on, it is as important as ever that we look back and learn the lessons of that fateful year. But we can also take heart and inspiration from the stories of courage, solidarity and pride that mark the strike.

When the strike was called off, Marlene Thompson, a miner's wife and activist, wrote a poem to mark the day:

*With heads held high we'll struggle on
But a scab's a scab till the day he's gone.*

FURTHER READING:

- *Women and the Miners' Strike 1984-1985*, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite & Natalie Thomlinson, 2023.
- *Never the Same Again: Women and the Miners' Strike*, Jean Stead, 1987.
- *Class Against Class: The Miners' Strike 1984-1985*, Sean Matgamna (ed.), 2015.

- Mandy and Michelle Tomlinson, Ollerton Colliery, Nottinghamshire, 1980s. Photograph by Brenda Prince. Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain.



GAYS AND MINERS: THE ENEMY WITHIN

Clive Bradley is a socialist and a screenwriter (*Trapped*, *Castlevania: Nocturne*). In the 1980s he was a member of Socialist Organiser (the forerunner of Workers' Liberty) and an activist in Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), a campaign group which supported the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) during the year-long strike of 1984–5. LGSM is depicted in the film *Pride* (2014) which brought the story to a wide audience.

Clive spoke to Ruth Cashman.

The idea for LGSM came from Mike Jackson and Mark Ashton at the end of June, at the London Pride march. I found out about the meetings when I ran into Mike doing a stall outside a gay bar in Islington, and thought: "Oh my god, that's fantastic!"

The first big demonstration I ever went on — I was 17 — was a mass picket for a trade union recognition dispute at Grunwick film processing factory in London in 1977. It was a picket line of 20,000 people; we were there to stop the scab vans going in. When the NUM arrived, the chant went up "the workers united will never be defeated!" It's the fucking miners! In 1974 their strike had helped bring down Ted Heath's Tory government.

BEGINNING

By the time the strike had started in 1984 we knew what was at stake in terms of the fight against Thatcher. We wanted to build support for the strike in the lesbian and gay community. Our main activity was raising money. Early on the government had seized the NUM's money and you had so many strikers with no wages at all.



• *Police at the Trade Union Picket at Grunwick, 1976.* Photograph by Val Wilmer, founding member of women's photography collective Format Photographers. Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain.

I think there were probably a dozen or so people at the first meeting, but it got bigger over the course of the strike. 40 people at each meeting with a core of two dozen or so. Then there were others that would stand outside pubs, rattling buckets and collecting cash.

The response outside gay bars was overwhelmingly positive. I remember a couple of arguments with people who said: "Why should we support the miners? They wouldn't support us", which obviously we were able to answer. We made quite a lot of money. When you got to counting the bucket, you would find someone had put in a £20 note, which was a lot of money in 1984.

My best memory was definitely the first trip down to the pit villages. The London group was sending funds to the Dulais Valley in South Wales. It was an amazing experience for all of us. We were put up with families for a couple of nights, and just hung out, got drunk and sang songs.

PRIDE

The experience of watching *Pride* was very strange. The writer Stephen Beresford did something very clever: a rom-com between two communities. That is a tricky thing to pull off, he did it well and people loved it – and there is enough in it that feels true to what happened. In my line of work people talk about "dramatic truth"

as opposed to actual truth. *Pride* has that. Obviously, there were some fictional characters – the character 'Bromley', the young one who gets involved and is later outed to his family – but I think Stephen needed that element of the story to draw us into it.

The actor who plays Mark, Ben Schnetzer, does an incredible job of capturing something of Mark's charisma. Mark was an infuriating but very charismatic person. I think – you can't be sure, but I think it's true – that none of it would have happened without Mark. He had an energy that was quite unusual.

POLITICS

Many of us were in socialist groups. Mark was in the Communist Party. I was in Socialist Organiser. There were people in Militant, or ex-members. That was part of what LGSM was. It was, in truth, people who were already politically active.

The biggest argument we had during the course of the strike was to do with the Polish Solidarity movement. Of course, other people will have slightly different memories of it, but this is how I remember it: the movement in Poland, led by the free trade union Solidarity, took place in 1980 [this was a mass workers' movement which won democratic and workplace rights] and it was crushed by a coup in 1981. I wrote a leaflet which

compared British trade union law to what was happening in Poland and took it for granted that a free trade union was a good thing. It was never published. Mark threatened to resign, which would have been disastrous. The Communist Party's position on Poland was ambiguous but they certainly didn't support Solidarity.

Mark and I would argue from our different political perspectives, as we all would, but we were focused on what united us: raising money for the strike. We all got on pretty well.

Mark was very good friends with Jimmy Somerville, the singer from Bronski Beat/The Communards – who supported LGSM. The band became big during the strike and when Mark died in 1987 Jimmy wrote the song 'For a Friend', which plays over the credits of the film. And of course, we all knew that's what the song was about – it was very moving.

LESBIANS

The inclusion of the L was quite unusual at that time. I think there were two lesbians at the first meeting. Later there were more. Further down the line some of the women set up a different group, Lesbians Against Pit Closures. *Pride* portrays the lesbians as a bit apolitical, that's not true. They felt that it was a very male-dominated group and they wanted to do their own thing, and so they

organised solidarity with a different pit. It wasn't a separatist move, it was just a women's autonomy thing. It remains, I think, a point of some rancor with some of the old veterans of LGSM, who felt it was a divisive move. My view at the time was that they had the right to do that.

Pride portrays some tension between miners and the lesbians and gay men, but I didn't experience any hostility or homophobia from the communities we visited. Because of their experiences on the strike they knew about the police and the state and so they were quite open to the idea that the world wasn't quite what they thought. If a bunch of lesbians and gay men were supporting them, that was welcome.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Around this time, you'd still get raids on gay pubs by the police. Everybody knew if you were queer-bashed then you were unlikely to get much sympathy. As a gay man there was what they called "pretty policing": undercover police deliberately enticing you into a public toilet then arresting you. There was a lot of hostility to the police and of course the miners shared that. The idea of being "the enemy within" – both trade unionists and lesbians and gays felt like that.

Sometimes when people talk about the experience of LGSM and the miners, you imagine that the miners had never thought about anything before in their lives, and suddenly they were learning about baking and opera. That's not true. These are places with a long history of struggle. I think it's important not to underestimate the level of political sophistication which existed in those communities. LGSM may have been new, but it was not as mind blowing in quite the same way as you might think.

LASTING BONDS

Our second trip down fell on the day the strike ended. Everybody was terribly upset. There was a feeling from some people that they were going to carry on, but that quickly fizzled out. I don't suppose the NUM had many other options at that point, because they had been failed by the rest of the labour movement, who hadn't come out on strike with them.

Some of us went back to Dulais Valley in 2015, the anniversary of the end of the strike. Ten of us went back to the miners' welfare where we'd been 30 years earlier. Ex-Labour MP Peter Hain came on the anniversary trip. While many people were perfectly friendly, you could tell that some people hadn't forgiven the Labour Party.

Neil Kinnock, who was Labour leader at the time of the strike, stayed on the fence all the way through.

The extraordinary thing, which, honestly, I found a bit embarrassing, was that they still felt this sense of shared history with us. They made us get up on stage and applauded us. I was thinking "all we did was raise some money – you were the people who did the strike!" But that gives a sense of how important that bond is; it's deeply rooted on both sides.

By the end of the strike, 11 LGSM groups had been set up across the UK. The London group alone raised £22,500 by 1985 (£66,000 in today's money). Following the strike, miners supported and joined gay pride events throughout the UK, and they led London's Lesbian and Gay Pride parade in 1985.

THE NEW SECTION 28

In the last issue of *Women's Fightback*, we reported on "the new Section 28" – the government's non-statutory guidance on trans pupils in schools. It was released in late December 2023. The advice to schools is that they should inform parents (without a child's consent) about requests to change gender; take "a very cautious approach" to allowing pupils to socially transition, and deny it entirely to primary pupils; that schools and teachers do not have to accept a child's request to socially transition (think uniforms and pronouns); and that girls' and boys' schools can refuse admission to trans pupils.

This attack on trans youth must be fought at every level. Trade unions in the 1980s were at the forefront of the campaign to repeal Section 28, the law banning schools from "promoting homosexuality".

We call on school workers in workplaces and on the education unions to organise a campaign of non-compliance.

Get in touch with our school workers fraction and organise with us on this issue: office@workersliberty.org

• Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. Photo held in the archive of The People's History Museum in Manchester.





• Protest in Mexico City, September, 2022.

LESSONS FROM MEXICO

MEXICO

Verónica Cruz Sánchez is the founder of Las Libres, an organisation based in Guanajuato, Mexico, which campaigns for universal access to free, safe and legal abortion. Since 2021, and the repeal of *Roe v Wade*, Las Libres have been supporting women in the US to access abortions as well.

Verónica spoke to Camila Vergara.

What is Las Libres?

Las Libres is a feminist organisation in Guanajuato, Mexico, that I and other feminists founded 23 years ago. In

2000, the state decided to criminalise abortion even in cases of rape, the only legal exception previously. There were big mobilisations against this law; we presented people with real stories and succeeded in getting large segments of the population outraged over an issue that society did not want to talk about. We managed to get the law struck down after only a month.

But we realised that, in practice, women in Mexico did not have access to abortions after rape. Most women either did not know they were entitled to an abortion, or were denied access by the authorities. That's how Las Libres started. We didn't

know how we were going to do it, but we decided we were going to guarantee access to free, legal, and safe abortions.

Helping women access abortion is a chief aspect of your work now. How did you get started?

We approached private gynaecologists, doctors, lawyers, and psychologists, and built a network of people who would help us support women and girls who had been victims of rape in accessing free, legal, safe abortions and in accessing justice. We educated ourselves. We learned about medical abortion [a process that usually involves taking mifepristone and misoprostol] and saw how simple it was.

Because we'd emerged during the protests, we were very well known. We stated publicly that we could guarantee abortion access, and women started to come to us. Women who hadn't been raped came to us too, and we'd say: "well, it's the same thing, isn't it?"

This is how the "abortion accompaniment networks", as they are known throughout Latin America, began: mutual aid networks that enable women to access safe abortions.

Jumping forward to today, we help women outside of Mexico, too. We've supported women from Texas since 2021 and, when *Roe v Wade* was overturned, we began receiving requests from all over the US. Today the larger part of our efforts are focused on women in the US. In Mexico, we are no longer the only network – as we were 23 years ago – and women have options. In the US we are the only Latin American network lending support.

The work to guarantee abortion rights is not exclusive to Mexico. There are protests and networks in the whole region. Can you say something about the phenomenon that's come to be known as the "Green Wave"?

I think it's important to note that the abortion rights movement, worldwide, has existed for a very long time. That is to say, women in the past have always supported other women in exercising their right to abortion. Whether it is legal or not to do so is another matter.

The concept of the Green Wave is very recent, starting in Argentina. The movement there became an example worldwide. After Argentina came Colombia, then Mexico. Even the US now, after the repeal of *Roe vs Wade*, is looking



• Demonstration in support of legal and safe abortion in Monterrey, Mexico, September 2021.

towards the south, when it used to be the standard for constitutional abortion rights. The Green Wave is the symbol of struggle for universal access to abortion in all territories.

This movement has helped us. The support networks develop by a process of "social decriminalisation", as each woman, family and community begins to speak about abortion as a right instead of a crime.

You say these networks rely on "social decriminalisation". Elsewhere you've spoken about the importance of educating women so they see themselves as rights-bearing subjects, instead of solely focusing strictly on legal rights. Could you talk a bit more about this strategy?

Las Libres pioneered the approach of eliminating the myths and taboos around abortion. To start, we ask every woman we work with: "What do you think about abortion?" One woman told me: "I know I'm going to kill someone, but I have to do it" (this is a very common response in the

US). I said: "Why do you think that you're killing someone? Who told you that?"

Mexico has come a long way now in destigmatising abortion, in contrast to the US. Mexico is ahead in saying "it's not a baby, it's not a person, it's not a bearer of rights — unlike women, who do bear rights." It's becoming quite common for people in Mexico (in general, not only those of us who are pro-abortion) to say "the product of conception" instead of "the baby".

When we started most feminists in Mexico would say to me: "don't do this, you're putting women at risk, they'll arrest you." They were speaking from within a criminal framework — legal or illegal — and I told them: "you have all taught me that abortion is a human right; part of the human right to health."

When women come to us seeking help and we tell them: "We are going to help you claim abortion as your right. We are going to guarantee your life, your health and your freedom." — their world changes.

Before they were "accompaniment networks", we called them "spaces for experiencing the right to abortion". We create a safe space for women to experience claiming that right, despite the myths and negative associations.

Is there an issue of lack of access to services, for those in more remote parts of the country?

Yes, as always, in rural areas, in indigenous areas, although there are a lot of support networks now. Indigenous women have created their own networks too.

But it is not the responsibility of women to guarantee abortion access. This falls to the state. Even in the most remote areas mutual aid networks exist, but we need to continue fighting for state-run services. One of our demands is that mifepristone and misoprostol be made available in all community health centres, which are accessible almost anywhere in Mexico, with care provided by a nurse, rather than a specialist.

How have you found the experience of mobilising in the US?

In 2021, we started organising in Texas first, after they introduced the famous "heartbeat bill", SB8 [A pro-life law that bans abortions after six weeks, when foetal cardiac activity can be detected.] We called all the pro-abortion organisations operating then in the US and there was definitely a different attitude to legality and illegality. Initially, there was a lot of fear.

When we'd say that we were going to guarantee the right to abortion, they would say: "no, we're going to give women money so they can travel to have abortions in states where it is legal". We'd say: "sure, but this can be done easily and safely at home, with only pills and information that's available online."

At the same time, it's progressed in the US very quickly, because there are more resources available. In Mexico, most people who "accompany" abortions are poor, but in the United States, the majority are privileged people. This means things can happen much more quickly.

What have you taken from the rollback of abortion rights in the US? Has it changed your approach?

Before, we all looked to the US and *Roe v Wade* as the standard in the region for a constitutional right to abortion. But I think its repeal has shown that you should not depend on the law. In Mexico, because we didn't have a constitutional right to abortion, we instead had to focus on the process of social decriminalisation and on struggling collectively for access to abortion outside of legal routes.

I think the repeal of *Roe v Wade* also reveals that you cannot treat abortion as an "individual right" and an individual problem, but rather a "collective right" and all of society's problem. When it's a "collective right", I make sure that others are able to experience it as I experienced it. I received support, so I'm going to support someone else. A collective right also relies on consciousness-building and social decriminalisation, so that even if abortion is restricted by the state, people will say that the state is wrong. The repeal of *Roe v Wade* is an opportunity to build a collective right to abortion.

What would you like to see from feminist movements elsewhere?

It wasn't until the repeal of *Roe v Wade* that Europe began to look at itself. Before, Europe and the United States believed – and we did too – that they had the right to an abortion, guaranteed forever (though even then there were problems of access and term limits). Women in the US are realising they have a big job to do.

In most of Europe mifepristone is only available with a prescription and can only be administered by a doctor. We say: "no, leave it in the hands of women and let them decide."

Today women in Mexico have options. You can buy your medication at a pharmacy. You can access a network that will give you free pills. You can go to the public health service or, if you have a lot of money and you want to spend a day in a hospital, you can do that too. When we talk about the fact that the state should not regulate abortion, that's what we mean. States should provide education and services, so that people are able to make the best decisions for themselves.

- Celebrations outside the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, Colombia, after the Colombian Constitutional Court voted to decriminalise abortion up to 24 weeks in February 2022.



In September 2023, the Supreme Court in Mexico voted to decriminalise abortion in all 32 states. Mexico's two congressional chambers now need to pass law removing abortion from the penal code. In the meantime, those that have abortions, and those that provide abortions, are protected from criminal charges.

Elective abortion is legal in Colombia, Cuba, Uruguay and Argentina – though Argentina's new President, Javier Milei, has pledged to hold a referendum on repealing the 2020 legislation which legalised the procedure.

Outright bans on abortion apply in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

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We have an Instagram account! Follow us for socialist feminist news and commentary and to stay up to date with our political activity.

 [womens.fightback](https://www.instagram.com/womens.fightback)



• Protest against Hong Kong Extradition Bill, 18 August 2019.

CHINA & HONG KONG

FREE THE HK 47!

BY AN ACTIVIST FROM WORKERS AGAINST THE CCP

In November, around 100 trade unionists, Hongkongers, Chinese dissidents and allies gathered at the Chinese Embassy to protest in solidarity with the Hong Kong 47 and other political prisoners.

The 47 are on trial for conspiracy to commit subversion. The charges relate to their alleged participation in a 2020 primary vote to select pro-democracy candidates for elections to Hong Kong's semi-democratic parliament, the LegCo. If elected, the candidates planned to advance the demands of the mass pro-democracy protest movement that had rocked the city over the preceding year.

Workers Against the CCP coordinated the November protest to coincide with the trial's closing statements. The authorities have dragged the trial out for years,

leaving many defendants to languish in jail. Even now (January 2024) there is no date set for verdicts.

Beyond the 47, the protest also stood up for the many other Hong Kong democracy and labour activists harassed and detained by the state.

CAROL NG

Carol Ng, one of the 47, was arrested after running for the Labour Party in the primary. Ng has a long history as a trade union militant. 20 years ago, she founded the British Airways Hong Kong Cabin Crews Union. As its leader she fought against discrimination, wage deductions, and job cuts. UK-based British Airways workers, who had become close comrades with Ng, brought the BASSA union banner to the protest and spoke of her kindness, determination and courage.

More recently, Ng became Chair of the HK Confederation of Trade Unions, and in 2019 led the CTU during a general strike in support of the democracy movement. The CTU has been active since 1990, fighting for democratic rights, backing strikes, and supporting solidarity networks for human and workers' rights in mainland China. It coordinated independent unions, distinct from the state-backed, Communist-Party-aligned Federation of Trade Unions, which avoids industrial militancy and, alongside most of HK's big bourgeoisie, has opposed democratisation.

The CTU was boosted in 2019 and 2020, as sections of the democracy movement

turned to trade unionism: "Resist Tyranny, Join a Union" was a regular chant, and a flurry of new independent unions were founded. But state repression smashed the movement into retreat and since 2021 the CTU and many of its affiliates have been forced to dissolve.

WINNIE YU

One of those new unions, combining workplace militancy and political action, was the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA), founded in 2019 by Winnie Yu. Yu is now on trial as another of the HK47.

Yu, a nurse, volunteered as a protest medic during the democracy demonstrations and occupations of 2014 and 2019. She founded the HAEA and in February 2020 led it in a five-day strike over the government's handling of border controls in COVID. Later that year, she ran successfully as the union's candidate in the primary vote.

By the time it was forced to dissolve in 2022, the HAEA was the largest health union in HK, representing around a quarter of health workers.

ELIZABETH TANG

We also highlighted the case of Elizabeth Tang. Tang is not one of the 47, but was arrested in March 2023 and charged, like the 47, under the totalitarian National Security Law.

Tang helped found the CTU and served as its chief executive for 16 years. In 2010, she helped found the Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Worker Unions, organising a notoriously exploited workforce of mainly migrant women. This evolved into the International Domestic Workers Federation, of which Tang is General Secretary, coordinating unions of household and care workers across 68 countries.

Tang had left Hong Kong in 2021. She was arrested when visiting her imprisoned husband (former CTU General Secretary Lee Cheuk-yan, himself serving multiple sentences for "inciting, organising and participating" in unauthorised protests). She awaits trial for alleged "collusion with a foreign country or external elements".

• Workers Against the CCP is a new coalition organising solidarity in the UK labour movement to support the struggles of workers and oppressed people in China and its occupied territories. Get involved: workersagainstthecpp.org



• Protest outside Independence Palace in Minsk on 30 August 2020.

EXILE AND THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY

BELARUS

Olga Karach is a Belarusian dissident, who helped to found the human rights group "Nash Dom", Our House, in 2005. She lives in exile in Lithuania, from where she has run the organisation since 2014.

Olga spoke to Michael Baker.

OUR HOUSE

We are a peace-building, human rights-focused, feminist organisation. More than 80% of our activists are women, and we do a lot of advocacy campaigns

within Belarus, as well as in Lithuania and Poland.

In Belarus there is a list of prohibited professions for women. That list used to contain 252 professions. It's been lowered now, to 186. In our opinion there should be no such list. The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenka, speaks constantly about the "protection of women", but in reality this is just the excuse the government gives to avoid improving working conditions for everyone, including men. We think it's very important to speak

about labour rights: we need real equality, especially in the labour market.

We also campaign for child prisoners, often imprisoned for non-violent crimes. In Belarus, there are about 20,000 teenage or child prisoners convicted under article 228, for drug possession. Lukashenka uses these children and teenagers like slaves. They work for prison companies and receive €5-10 per month, sometimes as little as €1. This lasts throughout 8-10 year sentences. Belarus only has a population of 9 million, so to have 20,000 young men behind bars is an unbelievable injustice. They face torture, no access to medicine, and many other problems.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, we began the campaign "no means no", the first "men's rights" campaign I've ever been involved in! We campaign for the right to refuse participation in the army. Officially Belarus is not currently participating in the war, but it is still involved: Lukashenka gave territory to Putin to bomb Ukraine, for example. We want to help young men realise their right to be conscientious objectors and to refuse to take up arms. The campaign is called "no means no" because it is very connected to gender stereotypes: many say "you have to join the army to be initiated as a real man". But there is also a lot of torture, even extra-judicial punishment in the army; suicides, and a lot of violence.

Conscientious objectors are important for many reasons. The first is strategic: how can Putin and Lukashenka use their weapons with no soldiers? Secondly, we need a wider social discussion about the roles of "real men" and "real women". Belarus is the fourth most militarised country in the region, after Russia, Ukraine and Armenia, and we are undergoing a transformation of the roles of women and men. We are returning to a time when the only "real man" is one with a weapon in hand. If, for any reason, you are not that man, you are seen as a second-class man. There is a lot of social stigma and public pressure.

So many problems stem from the return to these patriarchal gender roles. There is an enormous, invisible problem with domestic violence in "hero families", families of ex-soldiers. These men have deep PTSD, they can be aggressive, but it's very difficult for their wives to speak publicly about domestic violence. LGBTQ+ men and migrants also suffer terribly from these norms – far-right views are on the rise, particularly in this region.

BELARUS SINCE 2020

Belarus is living in real terror now. The situation is much worse than it was in 2020, since the mass demonstrations against Lukashenka's government. It's impossible to protest publicly in Belarus, but people obviously still don't like Lukashenka. We have about 1500 official political prisoners, but in reality the number is much higher – nobody knows how many. There are 11,000 criminal cases for "extremism", and for Lukashenka, extremism could mean wearing red and white clothes (the colours of the opposition movement), or writing something bad about the government on social media.

Political opposition inside the country is destroyed, and of course, the war affects Belarus greatly. People still try to protest and fight. Rail partisans in Belarus and Russia tried to destroy trains and rails carrying military equipment to the front – now the death penalty has been brought in for taking these actions, as well as for deserting from the army. People don't want to participate in the war, they mostly support Ukraine, but it's very difficult to say anything about it publicly.

We have no independent trade unions, no independent media, no independent

TV, no independent parliament, no independent prosecution department, nothing. Lukashenka controls everything. In February 2024 we will have so-called "elections" for the national parliament. Lukashenka is trying to gain legitimacy. He needs to do something to regain public support, which isn't easy because people hate him. Nobody knows how many have been imprisoned or tortured. Many people want democratic change, but under current conditions it's impossible.

Many Belarusians believe that victory for Ukraine will help the situation in Belarus. We hoped that Ukraine could win in 2023. There's disappointment and confusion, nobody knows how long the war will be, and it's clear that Putin will keep Lukashenka in power at least until the war ends – perhaps not as president but as some kind of leader. Lukashenka was very sick this year, which gave us some hope!

It is very hard to organise any sort of independent polling in Belarus. But if you speak about the half a million Belarusians outside the country, they tend to be very pro-European. Things were a little fuzzier before the Ukrainian war, but now you can't be in-between, you have to take a side. Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are three interlinked nations

– for many Belarusians this is like a war between brothers. Many Belarusians have relatives in both Ukraine and Russia, and the reverse is true of both other countries. Social and familial connections have been destroyed since the start of the war, families split over opinions on it.

OPPOSITION

Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya had incredible public support in 2020, but she has lost it by not being active enough. She was a media person, an "Insta girl", rather than a real political figure. She also had a number of corruption scandals. Many Belarusians have had to flee abroad: here in Lithuania we have 60,000 who fled after 2020. In Poland it's perhaps 300,000, in Ukraine 40,000. These people face a lot of legal issues, and problems with work, citizenship and children. There are a lot of suicides among Belarusian refugees in different countries. None of these refugees received any support from Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya. It's very clear that if a new wave of Belarusian protest happens, it will not be with the leaders of 2020. It's a sad story.

Perhaps this "media personality" is a necessary stage of development, creating the concept of a public figure. Everything is very new, and we have to do a lot of groundwork to formulate moral norms in public life. People are coming to understand what political groups and parties are, what a common vision is, what political dialogue is. Tsikhanouskaya doesn't want to have political dialogue with activists or civil society; she was not very active before the 2020 elections.

I am still very positive: our society has to formulate a new vision of the future for Belarus and the region. Many thought it was enough to go to a protest in 2020, that everything would change. But it doesn't work like that: democracy is a non-stop process of many people and groups struggling. This might be the main lesson of 2020. If you want to have some kind of influence, you have to act. And you have to act not once during a protest, but every day.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND EXILE

The space for Belarusian civil society abroad is shrinking. People are exhausted, they work very hard – 10 hours per day, etc. They have no time and energy for activism. When they do, many people focus on helping political prisoners and their families. Perhaps the biggest focus after that is helping Ukraine – supporting Belarusian fighters in Ukraine, and Ukrainian refugees abroad.

• Flowers, a symbol used in the protests against Lukashenka in 2020.



So conscientious objectors and feminist issues aren't a top priority. If you have several friends in prison, you think, first and foremost, about how to help them. Our House works to help refugees, especially in Lithuania, giving Belarusians and Ukrainians things they really need. People can take free clothes, shoes, furniture, everything. There's a lot of demand, and a lot of volunteers are involved in this kind of work.

Those who fled after 2020 can't return to Belarus. They left behind apartments and belongings. Many of their passports have expired, a huge problem. Lukashenka created a commission to aid people in returning to the country but the commission is a trap. There are many cases of people being granted permission, and then being arrested and imprisoned for seven years, even more, upon return. Problems with passports, legal status, residency permits — these are all urgent issues for Belarusian refugees.

I think it is important to speak about strategic goals: blocking the Belarusian army's participation in Ukraine is important. Lots of people just react to the situation as it changes. They think: "if the Belarusian army goes to Ukraine, then we can fight that". We try to work on prevention.

In just 2022, 400 criminal cases were brought against conscientious objectors. The Belarusian police have around 5,000 men wanted on conscientious objector charges. Of course, political prisoners and the war in Ukraine, the survival of refugees, these things are important priorities to have — but we also have to think about the future. We can't just run after the train, we need to drive it, to be proactive rather than reactive.

WHAT WE NEED

Belarus needs much more integration, and we need to learn democracy. For people who know only dictatorship — first Soviet, then Lukashenka — democracy is something very abstract. We need help to develop independent civil society structures: trade unions, political parties, NGOs, campaign groups, and so on. In my opinion, it would be very helpful to have some kind of common project or programme. People learn democracy in real time, in real places. We have to formulate many new ideas, and many new rules. European and British civil society can help us with these very complicated, difficult processes.



• Women dancing on the silos at dawn after invading the base, New Year's Day 1983. Photograph by Raissa Page, founding member of Format Photographers.

WOMEN IN REVOLT!

ART

JILL MOUNTFORD

• *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-90*

8 November 2023 to 7 April 2024
Tate Britain

This is an exhibition born out of love, respect and admiration. It is loud, proud, angry and gritty. It gives space and voice to those traditionally excluded: "working class [women], women of colour, the queers and the punks". It is trans-inclusive, intersectional and socialist focused. It is groundbreaking and rule breaking, audacious and unapologetic. It brings together the work of over 100 artists alongside feminist-activist artefacts and ephemera in an exhibition of art, social history and politics. It is the biggest exhibition ever staged at Tate Britain, by some distance, and the biggest survey of feminist art in the UK. Jam-

packed into three rooms, it is divided into six themes, plus three outside exhibits in one of Britain's biggest and most well-respected public art spaces. What is there not to love about *Women in Revolt*?

Linsey Young is the lead curator and turbo-driving force behind the show. The project repays a debt of gratitude to her mother, a working class single parent, who worked as a nurse and lived with a serious chronic health condition. As Young puts it: "a woman who was let down by the government's dismantling of the welfare state". How many exhibitions in galleries anywhere in the UK, have been inspired by a story so commonplace and yet so invisible to the art establishment?

The exhibition begins in 1970 with photographs and artefacts from the first

Women's Liberation conference in Oxford. Following a chronology in a somewhat "messy" show has its merits, but given this is a rule-breaking exhibition I think Young has missed a trick here. She should have abandoned convention and moved the white, middle-class women to another room further along and instead started *Women in Revolt!* with 'Black Woman, Time Now'. The stories told here, through the eyes of Black and Asian artists and through activists' photographs, magazines, posters, badges and pamphlets is the junction where class, race, gender and sexuality intersect and, for me, explode like a giant party popper.

MARLENE SMITH

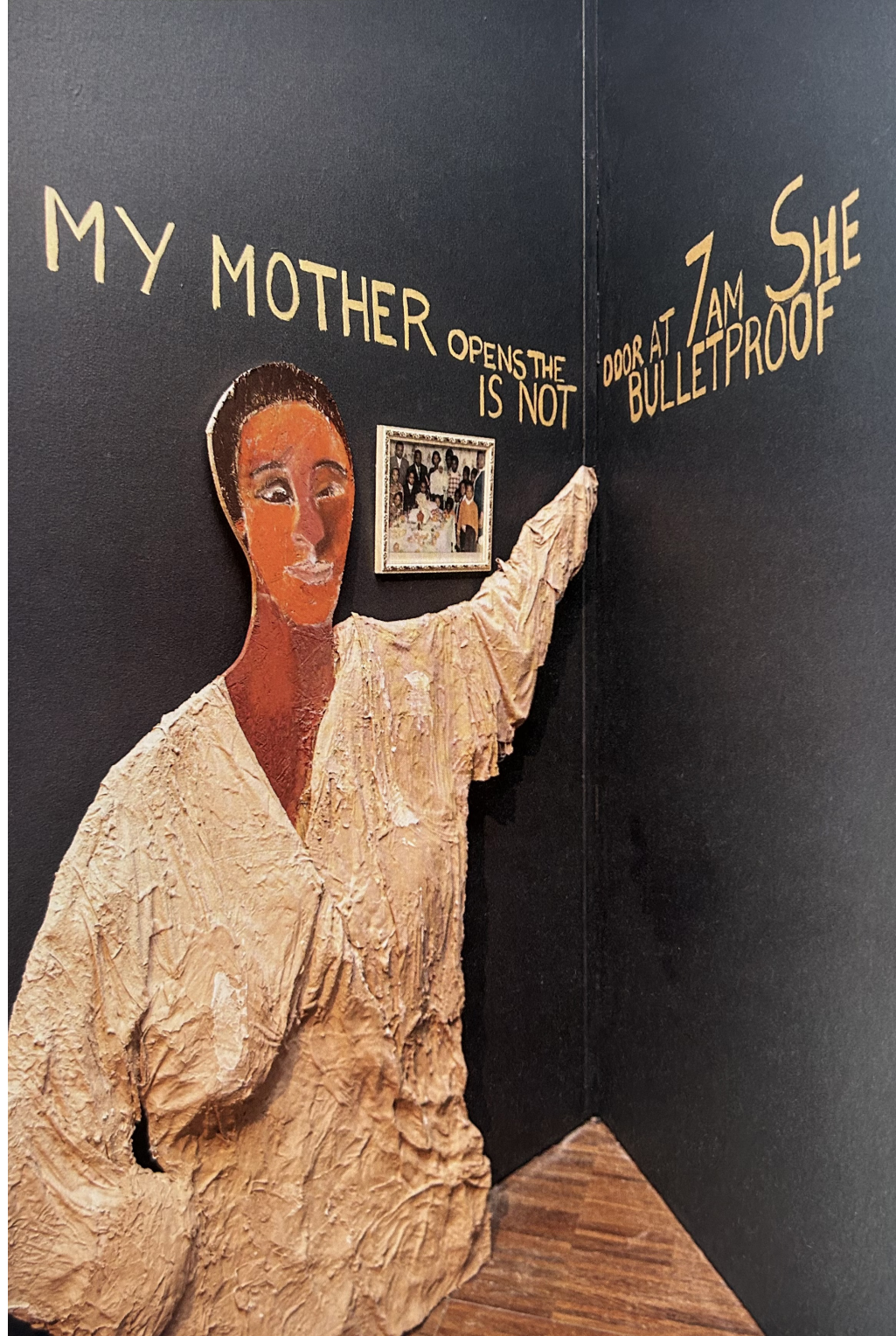
Marlene Smith's *Good Housekeeping III* (2023, a remake of her original 1985 piece) is a protest piece about the police shooting of Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce in September 1985, which sparked the 1985 Brixton riot. It consists of a portrait of Cherry and carries the words: "My mother answers the door at 7am. She is not bulletproof". This is a raw piece which speaks loudly about race, class, gender and policing in Thatcher's Britain. The shooting left Cherry paralysed from the waist down for the remaining years of her life, and sentenced her to an early death.

Smith's work is very arresting and I was plunged back into the events of the time. There was so much anger and energy in response to police brutality, poverty and unemployment. This energy was, however, unorganised. In 1985 the immediate tools to hand were rioting, looting, and more brutality. When Broadwater Farm in Tottenham erupted in October in response to the police killing of Cynthia Jarrett, rioters armed with machetes and knives killed PC Blakelock, practically decapitating him.

The labour movement was in retreat after the defeat of the miners' strike. Thatcher, and her working class-hating government, were driving an agenda of deregulation and authoritarianism, and was systematically crushing working-class institutions. Meanwhile our movement — the labour movement — was led by snivelling, treacherous gobshites. Neil Kinnock was leader of the Labour Party and Norman Willis led the Trade Union Congress. Neither of them had anything useful to say to black or white working-class youth, or the class as a whole.

SUTAPA BISWAS

One of my favourite works in the exhibition is *Housewives with Steak Knives* (1985), by Sutapa Biswas. This



• *Good Housekeeping III*, 2023, Marlene Smith.

is a painting of a housewife transformed into Kali, a Hindu goddess of war, set on destroying evil. Biswas painted Kali with a garland of severed heads, wielding what looks more like a machete than the steak knives I'm familiar with, and holding a decapitated white male head in one of her four hands. In another hand she holds a small flag with portraits of Atemisia Gentileschi, a rare woman artist in the Baroque period.

Gentileschi's earliest known signed painting, dated 1610, is an exquisite, large-scale painting of Susanna and the Elders. A subject often painted in this

period from the perspective of the male gaze, Gentileschi offers us a different perspective. She depicts two menacing, lecherous old men and a young woman, suffering and distressed. She decided to paint this while being harassed and stalked by an older man, an artist friend of her father, who would later rape her. The rape led to a traumatic seven-month trial where she confidently and robustly testified, while being subjected to the "sibille" a torture device/lie detector used at the time. Cords were wrapped around her fingers and progressively pulled tighter. On each pull she had to reassert that she was telling the truth.

• *Housewives with Steak Knives*, 1985, Sutapa Biswas



• Protest against Thatcher government, 1980s. Photograph by Brenda Prince, member of women's photography collective Format Photographers.



• *Between Parades*, 1985, Caroline Coon. Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain.

DEE DICKENS

POETRY

Dee Dickens (she/they) lives on a mountain in Wales with her husband and their two shedding familiars. They are a PhD student and a neurodivergent bringer of chaos. Her writing deals with what others leave unsaid in the hope that it gives someone, anyone, a voice.

MEDUSA

The Gorgon was made out of the terror, not the terror out of the Gorgon.
– Jane Ellen Harrison

I watched the moon that night
as a single stone
hewn
from the rubble my temple,
my eaving, once was,
dug into the small of my back.
As my hair weaved itself
to nest on my face,
to protect you from my eyes.
As my blood hissed on tarmac.
As your spit tried to prevent
the birth of the snake headed dragon.
As my petrified body
– cracked.
I watched the moon that night,
and dreamed of horses –

flying.

A NOTE ON BROTHEL-KEEPING

Between Parades is from Caroline Coon's collection *Brothel Series*, which depict her experiences as a sex worker. These paintings focus on the friendships forged by sex workers; a feminist answer to brothel scenes painted by artists such as Picasso and Manet.

DECRIM

The English Collective of Prostitutes' new report, *Proceed Without Caution* (2023), highlights how, under current laws, sex workers are forced to choose between keeping themselves safe and risking arrest, or avoiding a criminal record and putting themselves in danger.

It is an offence for a person to loiter or solicit in a street or public place; it is also illegal for sex workers to work out of shared premises, or "brothel-keep". And yet, a majority of sex workers working out of brothels are not working for managers, and it is often the safest option.

A "prostitute caution" differs from a police caution: it can be issued to anyone the police have "reasonable cause" to believe has committed an offence, and there is no right of appeal. Whereas a police caution is spent after two years, a "prostitute caution" will last until the recipient is 100. The injustice of this is stark.

We call for the decriminalisation of sex work.



ON READING ANNIE ERNAUX

LITERATURE

URTE MARCH

When, in 2022, Annie Ernaux became the first French woman to win the Nobel prize, the conservative newspaper *Figaro* disparaged the decision to award the "high priestess of autofiction" for a "lifetime spent writing about herself," while *Le Nouvel Observateur* caricatured her as "Madame Ovary". It is true that Ernaux's books are relentlessly personal, each plumbing the depths of a particular period, event, or relationship in her own life. The illegal abortion she sought as a twenty-three year old student, her first sexual encounter, a year-long affair she had with a married man, her mother's descent into dementia and drawn-out march towards death. Reading them is a profoundly intimate experience, an investigation of the act of remembering and the symbolic meaning we assign our own past.

UNFLINCHING

Ernaux has kept a diary since she was 11, and many of her books appear in diary form. With literary diaries, the text's authenticity as a contemporary record can be somewhat incidental. Nevertheless, Ernaux insists, in the preface to *Getting*

Lost (2001), that she has not edited a single word of what she wrote in the throes of erotic obsession 12 years previously. One has the impression that this is in fact true. Central to Ernaux's style is a self-revelation which forces the reader to bear witness, often in discomfort. She has said: "I have always wanted to write the sort of book that I find it impossible to talk about afterward, the sort of book that makes it impossible for me to withstand the gaze of others."

In *Happening* (2000), she describes in flat, limpid detail the bedroom curtains in the apartment of an off-duty nurse who inserts a probe into her womb, and later, the expulsion of the foetus "like a grenade" which she carries to the bathroom in a melba toast wrapper. Together with its unflinching gaze, there is radicalism in Ernaux's refusal to concede any moral ambivalence about terminating a pregnancy – she writes that for many years she celebrated the abortion "as an anniversary" which "launched her into the world". In *I Remain in Darkness* (1999), we witness her mother repeatedly lose and find her personal items in the early

stages of dementia; later, in the nursing home, "the things that get lost are never found. No one cares: they are going to die anyway".

INNER LIFE

The most evolved form of her style is in *The Years* (2006), a panoramic look back at decades of her life, where key personal milestones drift in and out of focus against the wider backdrop of historical events. It is 1955, the adults discuss the space race, a teenage Annie "imagines herself as a whore, yearns after...the girls in the grade ahead". It is 1966, a newly married Annie contemplates the Vietnam War, buys a television and abandons her writing ambitions, the contemporary Ernaux comments that this Annie isn't ("yet" is implied) ready to give up the pleasures of domestic life, the "repetition she believes she hates". It is 1992, Mitterrand is back in office, she hardly ever thinks about her ex-husband, though "inside she bears the imprint of their life together and the tastes he imparted for Bach and sacred music".

This book is a personal memoir, but also a meditation on one of life's contradictions: events reveal themselves more fully in the rearview mirror, as they are also fading rapidly into the distance. Despite the sensuality of her content, Ernaux's style is deliberately devoid of emotive language. She illustrates surroundings, narrates her thoughts as she remembers them and then unpicks them from a contemporary intellectual standpoint, "describing reality as through the eyes of a photographer". By writing to "preserve the mystery of every encounter", she reveals the yearning, melancholy, and terror animating our inner lives.

CLASS

Class and class differences are a recurring theme. Born to working-class parents who left school at 11, worked in factories and eventually bought and ran a café-grocery in a poor cotton mill region, Ernaux's ascent to the literary elite is also a painful leaving behind of what made her. In *A Man's Place* (1983), Ernaux writes about her father: the education she acquires opens an unbridgeable social chasm between them, while giving Ernaux the power of observation and reflection to witness him. The book opens with an epigraph from Jean Genet: "May I venture an explanation: writing is the ultimate recourse for those who have betrayed." An anti-establishment sensibility shines through, too, in Ernaux's insistence on the profundity of the commonplace. In *Happening* she writes: "I believe that any experience, whatever its nature, has

the inalienable right to be chronicled"; in *Exteriors* (1996): "social and cultural inequality are reflected in the way we examine the contents of our shopping trolley".

PERSONAL

"Autofiction", a term coined in the 1970s to refer to published works which straddle autobiography and literature, has been deprecated as a "women's" genre for its focus on bodies and personal, subjective meanings and identities. And it is true that women have been its pioneers. Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath paved the way, Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras picked up the baton, and the likes of Joan Didion and Vivian Gornick cemented the method within the postmodern literary landscape. Ernaux has cited many of these as influences, although Proustian and Freudian legacies are evident too.

If the rawness and vulnerability of autofictional works is a "feminine" attribute, then it is one which the intellectual establishment has come to champion. As early as 1996, *New York Times Magazine* proclaimed that "the age of the literary memoir is now," and to date there has been no visible decline of the self as a literary subject. Authors like Maggie Nelson, Sheila Heti, and Michelle Zauner are just a few who have published recent bestsellers in an autofictional style – on falling in love, motherhood, grief, the immigrant experience. Many universities now offer writing courses in memoir and the literature of the self.

A certain branch of the genre – Chris Kraus's 1997 cult classic *I Love Dick*, for example – subverts a feminist subjectivity by relaying the psychological experience of obsession with a man, both earnestly and as self-caricature. Subjecting one's

own emotional prostration before another to intellectual scrutiny reveals the perverse universality of the experience. Ernaux is not immune – *Getting Lost*, a day-by-day chronicle of two years she spent breathlessly anticipating the next visit of an aloof, intellectually lacking lover, is nearly three times the length of her other books. Yet her unashamed embrace of the power and joy of the erotic experience ("I've always made love and always written as if I were going to die afterwards") turns the power dynamic of the relationship upside down.

Men do not, as a rule, write books like this. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf comments that women writers write novels in part because being stuck in the home gives them the faculties to observe character. Something similar is at play with memoir, especially where the subject is desire – though women in western imperialist countries are no longer stuck in the home, they still wage a struggle to build a coherent self in the face of gendered social forces. Each truly intimate encounter runs the risk of destabilising a painstakingly constructed and maintained identity; faced with this challenge, writing about the self is a form of self-sorting and strength. For men, it seems, the "personal" is still more easily separable from that which is worth writing about.

SELF-REVELATION

Not all such writing is profound. In successful books like Olivia Laing's *Crudo* (2018) or Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* (2016), middle-class white women narrate a narcissistic internal monologue of their insecurities, traumas, and codependent relationships with their lovers and iPhones. The popularity of this type of book has spawned a mass market for "sad girl lit" full of unlikeable, privileged

characters who become increasingly unhinged when faced with relatively ordinary life challenges. Great literature should reveal something fundamental about the human condition in a particular social context, bringing the reader closer to a sense of collective and personal self-knowledge. If "sad girl lit" is an attempt to do so, then it is an indictment of the social context we live in: an alienated, consumer-driven, individualistic society where authenticity is a currency and your own story is more important than anyone else's. Here the common criticisms of "life writing" as performative, self-indulgent, and embarrassing become relevant.

Yet Ernaux, too, writes about the "ordinary" experiences of love, connection, and loss. What elevates her work is that she does not assign her own experience any world-importance, except as the only tool she has to understand her own life – just as each of our experiences are objectively extraordinary, but only to ourselves. She doesn't even claim ownership over her own past. In *Exteriors*, Ernaux sees a student reading an essay on the RER and fixates on the phrase: "truth is related to reality". This could just as well be an epigraph for Ernaux's entire oeuvre. Truth is related to reality, but only inasmuch as we continually process and re-process our conception of reality to arrive at something we call truth. Reflecting on her career in a late work, Simone de Beauvoir wrote that "self-knowledge is impossible, and the best one can hope for is self-revelation". In revealing herself, Ernaux shatters the loneliness of each of our simultaneous hopes for the same, extending a hand across the abyss. If this is "women's literature", then let us have more of it.





• *I travestiti, Cabiria*, 1965-70, Lisetta Carmi.

CHAMPION OF OUTCASTS: LISETTA CARMİ

LIZZY BROOKS

• *Lisetta Carmi: Identities*
20 September to 17 December 2023
Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art

Lisetta Carmi (1924-2022) said that she "took photographs in order to understand", and it is this humanism and empathy that *Identities*, exhibited by the Estorick Collection in London, sought to capture. The exhibition was split into two rooms,

both featuring her work from the 1960s. The first contained her study of two working-class communities: the dockers in the port of Genoa and women in a cork factory in Sardinia. As Carmi's friend Giovanni Battista Martini wrote: "Wherever there was an opportunity to explore the world of labour – in ports or in factories in the fields or in artisans' workshops – Carmi's lens explored the related social

ART

issues and the experiences of the working classes".

The second room, containing her most affecting work, exhibited her photographs of Genoa's trans community. These are my focus here.

BREAKING TABOO

In 1965, Carmi went to a New Year's Eve party at a house in the old Jewish ghetto in Genoa's historic centre, home to much of the city's trans community. Carmi asked to photograph them, and the next day went back to give them the prints. So began a seven-year long project, through which she would build strong bonds of friendship. In Carmi they had found a trusted ally, who would portray them with empathy and without judgement.

The photographs were controversial, as was the act of taking them. In his essay accompanying the exhibition, Roberto Lecarbonara writes about Carmi's willingness to break taboo: "many of the shots were taken on the streets, in squares, in cafés or on the beach, disconcerting passers-by and even arousing the ire of more conservative

members of the public. It was a radical and irreverent strategy."

Cross-dressing was illegal in Italy, following a royal decree in 1931. It remained that way until 1981. In 1968 and 1969, the Court of Cassation ruled that it was illegal for a man to appear in public dressed as a woman, and in 1972 and 1974 upheld the illegality of gender reassignment. Not only were Carmi's photographs irreverent, they were dangerous.

The first edition of *I travestiti* was published in 1972, with her essays on gender and art running alongside her photographs. Here she wrote: "I immediately understood that these were human beings who experienced, and suffered deeply from, the contradictions of our society, a minority that was both sought out and rejected." Her experiences left Carmi with an outlook on gender ahead of her time: "By observing them, I understood how all that is masculine may also be feminine and vice versa. There are no obligatory behavioural modes outside those of an authoritarian tradition that is

imposed upon us from childhood."

By recording her subjects in various states of readiness – applying make-up, styling their hair, dressed and undressed, fully made-up and wrapped in each other's arms on the streets of Genoa – Carmi reveals the beauty of bodies that don't conform, without sensationalism.

SEEING

The collection gives you a sense of each person's individuality: their humour, pride, and private moments of vulnerability. But she also captures the collective and its camaraderie; the importance of community.

Carmi wrote about how society's strict social mores had led to the disenfranchisement of not just the trans community, but all those who live in the margins: "[we live in] a society which, in order to defend a set of principles, is no longer capable of *seeing* people".

Carmi pursued the truth. She had an agenda and she was certainly a radical voice in mid-century Italy. She argued

that the trans community was modelling an alternative to the patriarchal society she lived in, and did so publicly. But her photographs don't strike you as propagandistic. They are both beautiful and mundane, empathetic but objective.

Carmi wrote: "I dedicated myself to photography for 18 years, always alone, and with an interest in and a passion for human beings, focusing on the most extreme situations to be found in this world of ours, which is so unjust and yet so fascinating. When they ask me: 'Who taught you to be a photographer?' I answer: 'Life'." Her career took her to many places around the world, and she witnessed some very dark moments. This collection, some of her earliest photographs, shows you what you can expect if you choose to explore more of her work: a photographer that was radical and irreverent. A champion of outcasts.

• *I travestiti*, 1965, Lisetta Carmi.





• Women's March, London, 1971. Photograph by Chandon Fraser.
Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain.

INTERVIEW

UNWELL WOMEN

Elinor Cleghorn, author of *Unwell Women: A Journey Through Medicine and Myth in a Man-Made World*, reflects on witch trials, birth control and fainting couches.

Elinor spoke to Justine Canady.

In your book you tell the story of Anne Greene, who had a stillbirth and was put on trial in 1650 for "Destroying and Murdering Bastard Children". This would have been during the most intense stages of the witch trials. How should feminists understand this historical period?

The crossover between feminist history and the feminist health movement in the 1970s really reinvigorated attention around the European witch trials in the 15th to 17th centuries. Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Witches, Nurses, and Midwives* (1972) made the suggestion that millions of women were killed during the witch trials. The available research doesn't bear out anything like those numbers, but what always fascinates me is that real attention is given to this in feminist history because it captures the imagination so precisely.

What actually happened at the time was chilling. The law was used to persecute ordinary women. This was not in the context of witch trials, but in the context of something like the crime of infanticide, which is what Anne Greene stood trial for in the early 17th century. She was a young domestic servant, who became pregnant after being raped by the son of her master. She had a stillbirth, panicked and hid the body. The law at the time meant that if an unmarried woman had a stillbirth and there was no one there to witness it, she was by default assumed to have murdered the foetus. If a woman was married the matter was much more private.

Any kind of restriction on reproductive freedom has got nothing to do with the care of anyone. It has to do with the control of women's bodies in the service of maintaining a patriarchal status quo.

This issue of women's reproductive rights being tied to marital status comes up again later in *Unwell Women*, when you discuss the rollout of the pill in Britain in the 1960s. The pill was at first only available to married women. One would think that if the state wanted to avoid having to care for the children of unwed mothers, birth control would be made readily available to all women?

Above everything else, what the British state feared doing with the roll out of the pill was appearing to endorse women's sexual freedom.

The idea of having the pill available for unmarried women was tantamount to encouraging women to enjoy themselves without any strictures upon them. The biggest enemy to the state is women deciding what to do with their bodies without the rule of man, because you can't have a functioning patriarchy without women and reproductive labour being controlled.

On contraception – in the context of the current roll-back of reproductive rights, to what extent should feminists talk about the negative aspects of this history and its ties to eugenics?

When *Roe v Wade* was reversed there were right-wing articles in the American press, which talked about how Margaret Sanger, who started Planned Parenthood, was a eugenicist. One of the most important things for us as feminist thinkers, is to understand that feminist history is not an uncomplicated history. You can absolutely acknowledge that Margaret Sanger was a eugenicist and at the same time acknowledge that she was really instrumental in the movement towards legalising reproductive technologies.

Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes were never pro-abortion. They were advocating for married women to have freedom to plan their families, and they did that through talking about married women's right to enjoy sex and choose how and when to have babies. The conversation was never about women deciding that they didn't want to be pregnant. There were those in the labour movement who argued for abortion rights, not just contraception, the Workers' Birth Control Movement and the socialist feminist Stella

Browne. It's a story normally not told in the history of reproductive rights and is a far more interesting one. Stella Browne has some amazing pieces of writing where she says that she doesn't want to have a kid, but does want to enjoy sex.

She was also around for the big pro-natal push between the wars, where the government message was "have a baby for Britain". Stella Browne asked the question: why should women's reproductive life be tethered to these wider national ambitions? Stopes and Sanger were both talking about family planning and voluntary motherhood in the context of nation building. They were talking about an overarching project in which women's reproductive freedom has to be slotted in to make it work in terms of colonial ideology. They only wanted the "fittest" to be having babies in the first place.

***Unwell Women* covers the fight for women's right to be doctors, which is important, but sometimes that is the only part of women's health history told. The book does a good job also covering the history of working-class women and other marginalised women, who aren't always part of the traditional history.**

When I wrote *Unwell Women*, it came from being an academic, where I was writing niche stuff for niche people. I wanted to write a book that could be read by somebody that had no understanding of feminist history and who didn't know anything about health feminism.

I'm interested in how knowledge is produced. The old narrative in western health culture, that unwell women are refined white women with money and access to the spoils of colonialism, hysterical and laying down on a "fainting couch", comes from the fact that these were the women who could afford to be seen by physicians. These were the kind of women who formed the basis of knowledge about things like hysteria, neuroses – major narratives in women's health. Until the early 20th century, there was no data on working-class women, because there was no space for them. They couldn't go to a private physician. There was no public health system.

The knowledge we have is burdened by who was able to receive care. We have so much work to do in terms of who has been neglected in the creation of knowledge.

To what extent is medical knowledge socially constructed?

Around the 18th century we see the beginnings of maternity wards in hospitals and the opening of children's homes. At the same time, Britain was fighting colonial wars and what Britain needed more than anything else was a large population. The rise in men becoming obstetricians was able to happen because there was a sudden new emphasis on growing the population. Now it was worth saving the lives of the kids of single women because they formed the basis of our armies and our tradesmen and factory workers. This meant that men, who previously were not allowed to attend births, because it was against the gender conventions of the time, suddenly had access to hundreds of birthing bodies, through which they could construct knowledge about birth. What was previously largely something dealt with by women, suddenly saw a culture shift.

It is not just about how knowledge is constructed, but to what end does this knowledge serve. When there are these expansions of knowledge or these shifts in medical culture, it's always in the service of something else.

The key conclusion of *Unwell Women* is: "believe us because we know our bodies". In reality, how would that work? We know that people are sidelined by the medical

community, but others believe in very unscientific ideas. The Covid pandemic showed us this.

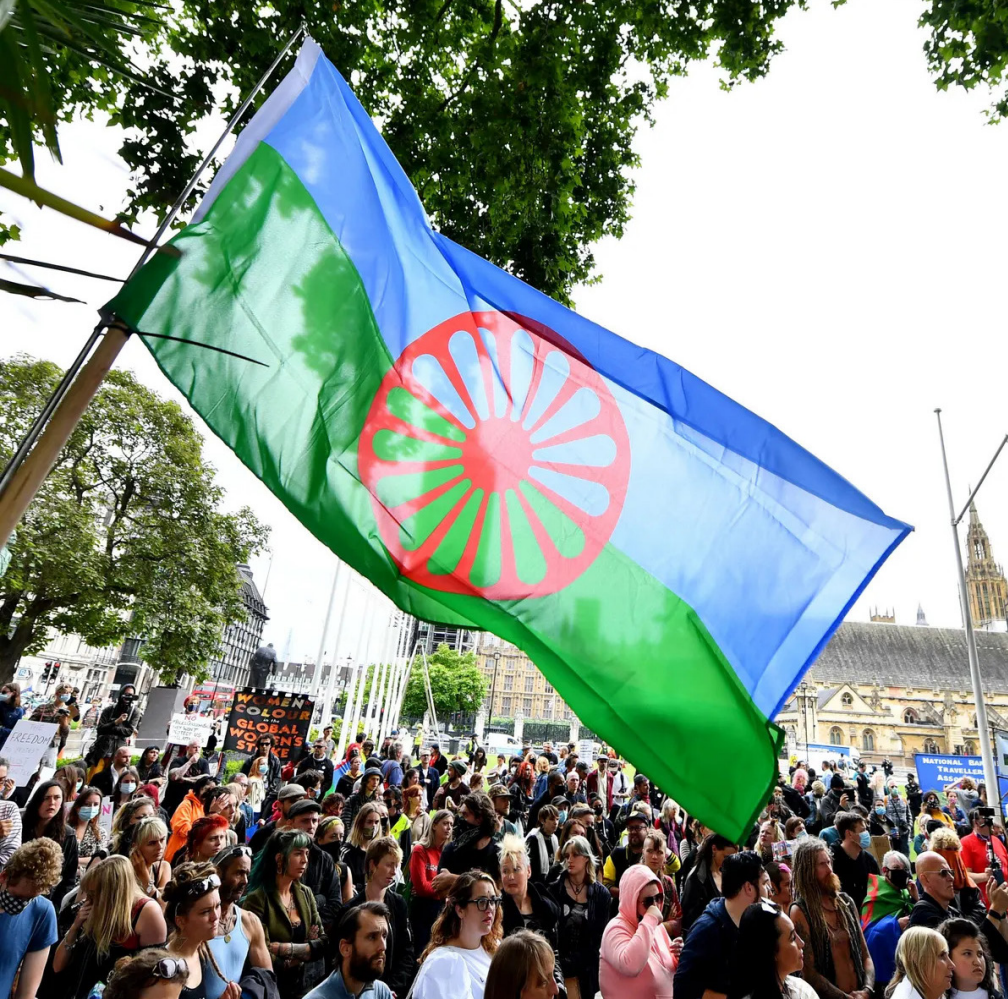
I think that a lot of my thoughts around this issue have become more complicated since the book came out. I wrote it during the pandemic. You cannot construct a medical system entirely based on people's subjective accounts of how they feel. And also, who gets to be heard? Who has that privilege; that access to language? Who actually gets to speak in certain contexts?

It's a great starting point when thinking about how meaningful change can be made and how it can be more patient-centred, but it is maybe less "believe us" and more "collaborate with us". If you're going to listen to women, how does that not just turn into a sympathetic head nod in the GP surgery. We need something more collaborative that works not from the idea of a normative person, but includes those who are most marginalised and unable to access healthcare.

• *Unwell Women: A Journey Through Medicine and Myth in a Man-Made World* by Elinor Cleghorn was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 2021.

• *Germ-Free Adolescents*, 1977, Marianne Elliott-Said (AKA Poly Styrene). Exhibited in *Women in Revolt!* at Tate Britain. Poly Styrene formed the punk band X-Ray Spex in 1976. She was one of few women of colour to be visible in the 1970s UK punk scene.





ANTI-RACISM

THE ROMA STRUGGLE FOR HEALTH

NANCY RIPLEY

Recent legislation – namely the Police, Crime, and Sentencing Act (2022) – gives the government new powers which are intended to push out the Roma way of life. Roma-government relations have become more strained as a result, and access to resources a harder and more weary battle. The Act does a number of things, the most problematic of which is the criminalisation of “trespassing” on public and private property. At the same time as attacking the right to protest, it clamps down on the act of traversing land, a central element of Roma culture. It is one of the worst attacks on the community in recent memory.

Why is this relevant? For years, the community has been neglected by modern

institutions, including education and healthcare. Although some reports show some progress on these fronts in recent years, the wider public still know very little about Roma people and their struggles.

HEALTH GAP

The government’s political assault will widen the health gap by moving along settled members of the community and cutting off their access to stable resources. It also reinforces negative public perception of Roma people, which means these inequalities will persist.

For many members of the community, lack of a permanent address means that they are unable to register with or keep a GP. This tends to mean worse health outcomes and that individuals come to rely on unqualified medical advice from members of their household. Whilst a fundamental element of the way of life is travelling, many families or groups have a pre-planned or seasonal route that they follow, which helps them to better navigate state systems. In an age when travelling and gap years are commonplace, it is vexing that the Roma are being pushed to change their way of life in order to accommodate inadequate institutions and services.

Some key identifiers of the community lie not in their cultural dress, or unique way

of life – but in their values. At the core is a deeply-held sense of loyalty, particularly to family and friends, with a strong emphasis placed on trust, truth, and the protection of children. These values are common to many in the societies that Roma people inhabit. It is essential that these similarities are recognised, and that members of the community are treated with respect, helping them gain confidence in public institutions and the wider public, improving access to networks outside of the home.

WOMEN

Roma women have particular health needs, in part because of cultural values and the role of women in Roma society. Traditionally, the act of menstruation has been seen as dirty, and items of clothing worn while a woman is menstruating washed separately. The menstruating woman is separated from the rest of her household, to help contain the “mahria” – or uncleanness. There is a traditional link between bad smells and evil in Roma culture. Sexual health is also taboo, and accessing support can be viewed as shameful. As a result, many women face substantial barriers to leading healthy lives.

YOUTH

Research also shows that many Roma women do not have access to birth control, abortions and other important procedures. The report commissioned by Pavee Point Travellers Centre, *A Pavee Perspective: Travellers’ Attitudes to Sexual Relationships and Sex Education*, highlights the importance of increased sex education in the traveller community. Due to the majority of the community being early school leavers (for reasons including family pressure, exclusion, a change in address, or just because it is considered the norm) young people often do not have the necessary resources to both understand, and to feel comfortable in, their own body. This makes getting help a daunting prospect.

The NHS in 2024 is an underfunded and overworked service at the best of times. For Roma people, the situation is much worse. A large part of improving the community’s access to healthcare will be about education and combatting misconceptions in wider society. In the process of fighting harmful and racist legislation, we can challenge negative narratives and create a society that engages with the individual needs of Roma people, rather than treating us as an externalised, excluded homogenous group.



• Demonstration against the Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill, London, May 2021.

REVIEW

ABOLITION REVOLUTION

RUTH CASHMAN

Abolition Revolution by Shanice McBean and Aviah Sarah Day is an attempt to bridge the gap between revolutionary politics and police and prison abolition – to use abolition as “a tool to re-imagine revolutionary politics.” It was published in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020 and the eruption of activism and intellectual output that followed it.

The book consists of 16 theses, each a stand-alone argument, allowing each

chapter to be read on its own. *Abolition Revolution*'s structure offers an easy means to explore the authors' ideas.

The first thesis is a blunt reminder that vibrant protests which erupt into national consciousness can fall away quickly without an organisational form. The chapter surveys the ‘national abolitionist movement’ taking shape around Kill The Bill, Black Lives Matter and the Sarah Everard vigils. These movements are now just a shadow.

A book written at a highpoint in struggle, which tries to cover 16 theses on the relationship between criminal justice and the overthrow of capitalism was always going to contain a few misfires and overreaches. But this book is genuinely valuable as a starting point for discussions about the purpose, history and ideology of policing and state coercion.

McBean and Day write unashamedly from a class perspective, declaring that

the “foundation of policing is coercing and controlling the working class”. They also see the potential (and the failures) of the labour movement. “Workers and trade unions, particularly those who hold a strategic or powerful position within the public sector, like medical staff and teachers, can play a decisive role intervening in the expansion of surveillance powers.” Running through the book is a first-hand knowledge of activism and investment in struggle. Thesis 2 covers their experiences of organising in Sisters Uncut.

The theses on race and gender grapple with how oppressions are perpetuated and defined. Whereas much of the literature on policing that has come out since Black Lives Matter has tended toward very shallow history, *Abolition Revolution* highlights how criminal justice institutions – and the racist ideologies that underpin them – can and have been reformed while continuing their essential function.

“Race, in this sense, is porous: its boundaries can bend and flex, letting people in and out as a function of state coercion and control. This is seen throughout history, in the way shifting political, economic and social contexts force Jewish, Irish, Eastern European and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller folk to enter and exit whiteness.”

The overall message of the book is that dismantling carceral systems (a demand in which there is already mass interest) can be a stepping stone to revolutionary overthrow of class society. While this might seem to provide a shortcut from already-existing abolitionism to the abolition of class exploitation, on closer inspection it falls apart. As Day and McBean explain, the role of state violence is at its core the protection of private property and class exploitation. It is impossible to abolish this function in a society based on private property.

Abolition Revolution makes an excellent case for the need to push back against the powers and reach of the police, to demilitarise it, and to decriminalise areas of life. These demands, and the campaigns that are already working on them, should be taken up by the labour movement.

The book offers a class-struggle, internationalist, liberatory, socialist perspective which is desperately needed on the left.



• Sukhdev Reel holding a photo of her son Ricky.

THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

ANTI-RACISM

LIZZY BROOKS

Sukhdev Reel spoke at our socialist feminist day school All The Rage in London in November 2023.

In 1997 Sukhdev's son, Ricky, was killed in a racist attack in Kingston-upon-Thames, in London. The police failed to properly investigate Ricky's death. While campaigning for justice, she and her family were spied on by undercover officers. Her book, *Ricky Reel: Silence is Not an Option*, was published in 2022.

On 21 October 1997, Sukhdev was told by the police that the body of her son, Ricky, had been found in the river Thames. She describes the moment: "Engulfed... I could not see, hear or think beyond the vortex."

MISSING

A week earlier, Ricky had been walking home from a party with three friends. Two white men shouted racist abuse at them, and then attacked. His friends managed to get away. Ricky never came home. In the morning, Sukhdev rang the local police station to report her son missing: "What I was told was, 'We are busy, we can't come'." She pleaded with them, but they were obstinate.

Sukhdev went to the police station in Kingston, as did Ricky's three friends. Despite being told that the three young men had been attacked, and being shown the resulting injuries, the police stated that they would have to wait 24-hours before investigating Ricky's disappearance. A police officer then began to suggest reasons Ricky may have disappeared: "You Asian people – you're always forcing your children into arranged marriages. Maybe your son decided to run away." They said – "with a wink" – that Ricky might be gay, and may have left to pursue a new life.

Sukhdev and her family spent a week trying to find Ricky, leafleting and putting up posters. They were joined by friends and neighbours, who formed search parties. "I was out every night", Sukhdev told us, "until 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes I spent all night walking around Kingston. I was like a zombie."

The police, however, were nowhere to be seen and less than 48 hours after Ricky's attack, she was told that the police had

closed their investigation due to lack of resources: "I realised I was being told that money was more important than Ricky's life." The investigation did continue, but only after Sukhdev's local MP, John McDonnell, intervened.

A few days later, Sukhdev and her family were told that Ricky's body had been found in the river Thames, a short distance from the location of the attack. The police stated that Ricky's death was the result of a tragic accident, and declared the case closed. "We knew that if we were going to get justice for Ricky, we were going to have to do it ourselves."

SHARED PAIN

Sukhdev launched the Justice for Ricky Reel campaign. Its first public meeting was held in January 1998; Stephen Lawrence's father spoke from the platform. Stephen Lawrence was murdered by racists in 1993, and the case had generated widespread outrage and public sympathy. An inquiry into its handling by the Metropolitan Police culminated in the Macpherson Report, which found that the investigation into Lawrence's murder had been "marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers." Naturally, links between the two campaigns were built early on. Sukhdev attended the second stage of the Lawrence Inquiry in 2000.

In the preface to *Silence Is Not An Option*, Suresh Grover, Director of the Southall Monitoring Group, described how Sukhdev threw herself into the struggle for justice, not just for Ricky but for all victims of racist violence: "she joined their meetings, she marched with them, shared their tears and pain and encouraged them not to give up." Sukhdev lists the names: Stephen Lawrence, Christopher Alder, Michael Menson, Daniel Morgan, Cherry Groce, Joy Gardiner, Roger Sylvester, Trevor Monerville, Blair Peach, Harry Stanley and Zahid Mubarek. "I know how lonely it is to fight alone", she says. "All of us struggling to get justice for our loved ones."

Ricky's inquest was public, with a jury. Jury inquests are rare, and the campaign had fought hard for it to be granted. It took place on 1 November 1999. Sukhdev writes: "It was clear that this was not a hearing to establish how Ricky died but rather for the police to discredit any credible evidence concerning Ricky's death that did not neatly fit into their own theory." Many of the questions were unrelated to Ricky's death and instead

focused on the campaign. Why had they set up the campaign? When did they make contact with the Southall Monitoring Group? Why had Sukhdev attended the Lawrence Inquiry?

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Sukhdev believes that in the context of the public inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's death, the police were determined to avoid further accusations of institutional racism. But the failings of the police were stark. Despite the fact that Ricky had disappeared immediately after a confirmed, violent attack by racists, the police refused to make the link.

Sukhdev said: "Just months before Ricky's death, close to where I live, there had been a deplorable attack by Asian youths on a young white boy who happened to be a police officer's son. Police had moved heaven and earth to catch the assailants, within days they were found and charged and eventually prosecuted. Not a day goes by when I don't ask why my son's attack, disappearance and death was not treated in the same way."

The police didn't conduct any forensic analysis of the riverbank in the days following Ricky's disappearance. They didn't interview key witnesses. They didn't look through the CCTV footage tracked down by the family. And before a post mortem was conducted, they reported to journalists that Ricky had suffered an "accidental death", a story they stuck to.

The jury at Ricky's inquest delivered an open verdict, refusing to accept the police's version of events. It was an important milestone for Sukhdev and the campaign.

SPY COPS

Fast forward to 2014 and Sukhdev is invited to meet the police once more. She is told that their campaign had been subjected to surveillance and intelligence-gathering by Undercover Police Officers. The police described it as "collateral intrusion", unfortunate but unavoidable. "We were spied upon at a time when we were vulnerable, shattered by Ricky's death. We were at our lowest ebb, willing to welcome anyone into our lives who offered even the faintest glimmer of hope in our attempt to get answers. The police took advantage of this to infiltrate our lives."

It wasn't just the Reel campaign. Undercover police were employed to spy on dozens of campaigns set up in response to racist murders, police

shootings or deaths in police custody. The purpose wasn't just to surveil, but to sabotage.

The Mitting Inquiry into undercover policing is currently ongoing. It is set to scrutinise the deployment of almost 140 undercover officers who spied on more than a thousand political groups across more than four decades.

Sukhdev and her daughter are core participants in the inquiry. Their submission, which has been made jointly with other family justice campaigns, argues: "There was no reason for there to be any undercover policing of the Reel family campaign, it was not associated with any form of violence or criminality... That police resources — seemingly unavailable to provide an adequate investigation of [Ricky's] death — were nonetheless available to spy on the family is difficult to comprehend."

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

More than 25 years on from Ricky's death, the family's struggle for justice has lasted longer than Ricky was alive. Speaking to us in November, Sukhdev made a plea: "If you face an injustice, stand up and fight back. I have been fighting for 25 years — and yes, there have been many tragedies in between — but I made a promise to Ricky, that no matter what happens, I will carry on fighting."

Sukhdev's story has as much relevance today as it did a quarter of a century ago. One example is the now-notorious "Gangs Matrix", which disproportionately targets black youth and designates them as criminals on the basis of the music they listen to or their posts on social media. Those who find themselves on the Matrix are subjected to over-policing, school exclusion, eviction; they can lose welfare benefits, and even face deportation. More than 80% of people on the Gangs Matrix are black. Amnesty International said: "Some police officers have been acting like they're in the Wild West, making the false assumption that they can set up fake profiles and covertly befriend people online to monitor them."

Sukhdev's fight for justice is an inspiring story of love and determination. But it is also a story of violence, state surveillance and an institution, the police, seemingly impervious to reason and accountability. That such institutional racism is allowed to persist will not come as a surprise to many black people in Britain today — and that should make us all the more determined to fight it.



ORGANISE WITH US

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

We stand for trans-inclusive, sex-positive, class struggle feminism. We organise in our workplaces and trade unions, and in the student movement and Labour Party for socialist feminist politics.

If you would like to organise with us, or contribute to *Women's Fightback*, please get in touch:

 workersliberty.org
 womensfightback@workersliberty.org
 [womens.fightback](https://www.instagram.com/womens.fightback)

JOIN A BOOK CLUB

We run socialist feminist book clubs in London, Sheffield and online. Each month we discuss an essay or book – either a new release or a classic from the movement.

BRIXTON, LONDON Effra Social, SW2 1DF

• **Sunday 18 February, 11.30AM.**

In February we'll be going together to see the *Women in Revolt!* exhibition at Tate Britain. Afterwards we will go to a local pub and reflect on what we've seen. To come with us visit: bit.ly/inrevolt-18-02

Optional reading:

The Black Women's Movement: Fighting On All Fronts, essay by Stella Dadzie and

Too Much to Dream? Trans People and the Art of the 1970s and 1980s, essay by Juliet Jacques.

• **Sunday 10 March, 2PM.**

Social Reproduction Theory, by Tithi Bhattacharya, with a focus on her essay 'How Not to Skip Class'.

• **Sunday 14 April, 2PM.**

Never The Same Again: Women and the Miners' Strike, by Jean Stead.

For a copy of the essays/books or for more details, write to:

womensfightback@workersliberty.org

SHEFFIELD Showroom Cafe, S1 2BX

• **Monday 5 February, 5.30PM.**

Marxism and the Oppression of Women, by Lise Vogel, with a focus on Chapter 10.

For a copy of the book(s) or details of upcoming meetings, write to:

sheffield@workersliberty.org

ONLINE

• **Monday 22 February, 7PM.**

Marxism and the Oppression of Women, by Lise Vogel, with a focus on Chapter 10.

For a copy of the book(s) or details of upcoming meetings, write to:

womensfightback@workersliberty.org