



WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

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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IN THIS ISSUE

As we have entered 2026, we have seen crises on multiple fronts intensify across the globe. In the US, there have been eight ICE-related deaths since 1 January, Trump abducted Venezuela's leader, and continued his nationalistic programme to carve the world into rival blocs. The Epstein files have caused shockwaves across the world, but brought little justice to victims. In the UK, Reform and the far right remain on the march, and Labour hold no answers to oppose them.

In this issue, we delve into these crises and stake our claim that the workers' movement holds the power for solutions. We look at the Epstein files and the institutional betrayal which allowed wealthy men the world over to carry out, and cover up, heinous abuses. We continue to explore women's role in the far right and the institutional violence of immigration controls. We look to Iran and the fight for women's freedom renewed in recent struggles against the regime. We look at the harms caused by anti-trans rhetoric and last year's Supreme Court decision. Read on for this and much more.

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• ICE agents fire on protestors. Minneapolis, MN, January 24, 2026

EDITORIAL

THE WORLD IN CRISIS

It is only February 2026, and already this year has confronted us with a cascade of crises that expose the violence at the heart of the global order. From escalating US intervention in Latin America, to the brutal repression of protesters in Iran, to the deadly intensification of ICE deportation operations across the Atlantic, the message is unmistakable: state power continues to be wielded against the vulnerable with impunity.

And as if the geopolitical storm were not enough, the release of millions of documents from the Epstein network has laid bare – again – the scale at which elites facilitate and profit from sexual exploitation. No country is untouched, every country appears as a transit hub in this machinery of abuse.

For socialist feminists, none of this is surprising. Our rage comes from recognising the pattern: these are not isolated scandals but expressions of the same violent structures – capitalist, patriarchal, racialised – that shape the justice system and protect the powerful. We are not just witnessing events; we are witnessing the system revealing itself.

Layered on top of this political reckoning is a technological one. AI, sold to us as efficiency and progress, is already being weaponised to reproduce misogyny in grotesque new forms – from non-

consensual pornographic deepfakes to apps that generate the fantasy of a compliant, programmable girlfriend. Meanwhile, social media algorithms continue to shape our reality, radicalising users and providing fertile ground for the far right to spread its politics unchecked, undermining hard-won feminist gains in areas such as reproductive justice.

ICE AND THE VIOLENCE OF LIBERALISM

In Minneapolis, two US citizens – Renée Good and Alex Pretti – were killed in the street this year during intensified ICE operations. Good was shot while reversing her car as agents approached; Pretti, who legally owned a firearm, was disarmed, pinned to the ground, and then shot. At least six more have also died in dealings with ICE so far in 2026: Luis Gustavo Núñez Cáceres, Geraldo Lunas Campos, Víctor Manuel Díaz, Parady La, Luis Beltrán Yáñez-Cruz, and Heber Sánchez Domínguez.

These are not isolated tragedies. They are the predictable outcome of an agency built on racialised policing, impunity, and the dehumanisation of migrants.

ICE functions as a modern apparatus of state terror. Its violence extends far beyond street killings: forced sterilisation, sexual abuse in detention centres, and the

routine degradation of migrants have been normalised under a bipartisan political order. As the article in this issue shows, this brutality did not begin with Trump. It is embedded in a capitalist 'liberal' system that treats migrant lives as expendable and offers no real protection from state violence.

Protests continue across the United States, especially in Minneapolis. People are confronting the reality that liberalism has its eventual limits and creates a fertile ground for authoritarianism to flourish. It is a poison ivy wrapping itself around us until we are no longer compliant. And once such disobedience is displayed, as we are seeing now in America, it is met with extraordinary violence. Whether this moment of psychological rupture will translate into sustained political transformation remains uncertain, especially in a year already defined by crisis after crisis.

THE UK: LIBERAL DECAY AND THE FAR-RIGHT ADVANCE

Here in the UK, we are not insulated from the consequences of liberal decline. The far right is encroaching on the political terrain, and with local elections approaching across 106 English authorities, socialists are watching closely. Many in Workers' Liberty are campaigning to prevent Reform

candidates from gaining ground – a fight that is fundamentally about class politics.

At the same time, the Green Party is gaining momentum, particularly among young people. Zack Polanski's platform gestures toward redistribution and taxing the rich, and it resonates with a generation exhausted by inequality. Yet the absence of explicit alignment with trade unions – and the lack of a consistent presence on picket lines – reveals the limits of a politics that gestures left while remaining structurally detached from the organised working class.

This issue does not cover the Greens or local elections directly, but our organisation's fight continues: within the Labour Party, within trade unions, and within every space where class politics must be defended against both liberal complacency and far-right advance. If you are a member, you already know how fatal it is to ignore class. If you are new to this magazine, consider it an invitation to recognise that feminist issues are class issues – and that if you are tired of this system, now is the time to act.

EPSTEIN FILES AND THE UK

On 30 January, the US Department of Justice released a further three million pages of material from the Epstein investigation, including 2,000 videos and 180,000 images. Yet this represents only half of what remains sealed: around six million files are still being withheld. The Department has insisted that this latest batch will be the final one made public and that it has now fulfilled its 'legal obligations'. But fulfilled to whom? Because what is increasingly clear is that the obligation has been fulfilled to protect the powerful – not to inform the public.

Despite the scale of the release, many emails and documents indicating trafficking, abuse, and the facilitation of violence have been heavily redacted. The names of those involved – the perpetrators, the enablers, the network – remain hidden. Lawyers representing Epstein's victims have condemned this process, arguing that the system has prioritised shielding abusers while forcing survivors to fight for justice under the anonymity of 'Jane Doe'. That anonymity has been undermined further by the fact that many survivors' identities are now widely known, since their privacy was not protected in the files at all.

Of course, this is not simply a US affair. Epstein's trafficking network operated across borders – in its victims, its logistics, and its abusers. At its core, this is a global issue and, as many have pointed out, a class issue. The perpetrators were not marginal figures but members of the elite across multiple industries: from billionaires like Bill Gates to academics such as Mark Tramo, now at UCLA, and Martin Nowak, a professor of mathematics at Harvard. The network's reach exposes how deeply embedded sexual exploitation is within the structures of wealth, power, and institutional prestige.

Unsurprisingly, the files also implicate a number of high-profile political figures. Among them is former Labour MP and UK ambassador to the US, Peter Mandelson, who maintained a close relationship with Epstein even after his first conviction. The documents reveal a pattern of behind-closed-doors political dealings carried out with no accountability or transparency – a reminder of the deep cracks in the liberal world order. Mandelson appears to have worked with Epstein to influence government plans to tax bankers' bonuses, even asking Epstein to use his connections at JP Morgan to pressure then-Chancellor Alistair Darling.

And then, of course, there is ex-prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor – a figure whose involvement has been known for years. Virginia Giuffre bravely came forward in 2014 to state that she had been trafficked by Epstein as a minor and abused by Andrew. Her testimony was credible, supported by a photograph of the two together. In 2021 she filed a civil suit, which resulted in a settlement. The newly released files only deepen the horror: one image shows Andrew on all fours behind a girl – a child. We do not know the full context, but we know the answer is not innocent. It is grotesque. It is unimaginable.

The files also confirm what Andrew repeatedly denied: that the photograph with Giuffre was real. A 2015 email from Ghislaine Maxwell references it directly. Emails between Andrew and Epstein further suggest that Andrew used his official role as a UK envoy to pass on discreet commercial and political information. Once again, we see the same pattern: the machinery of capitalism protecting its own, shielding men who believe they are entitled to exploit, harm, and abuse the very women and children who – seeking safety or a better life –

were instead trafficked and violated.

TECHNOLOGICAL INVENTION: FURTHER ERASURE OF CONSENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

This issue of Women's Fightback also turns to the rapidly evolving – and increasingly terrifying – terrain of algorithms and AI. It is no longer credible to treat social media or emerging technologies as somehow separate from politics, class struggle, or feminism. These systems are built and controlled by a tiny elite – overwhelmingly wealthy white men – whose profits depend on polarisation, outrage, and the erosion of democratic and bodily autonomy.

Algorithms have become pipelines to far-right radicalisation, constructing echo chambers where hateful content spreads unchecked, insulated from debate or fact-checking. Tech companies have created environments in which reactionary and conservative groups thrive, using platform design to amplify attacks on reproductive justice, bodily autonomy, and feminist organising. These same companies are also driving the development of AI technologies that are already being weaponised against women. Deepfake tools have made it possible to generate sexualised images without consent – and the consequences are immediate and devastating. After the murder of Renée Good, deepfaked sexual images of her began circulating online, created from photographs taken from her own social media. Consent is erased at the click of a button.

In February, the UK government finally moved to criminalise the creation of 'nudified' images and the apps that produce them. Those found creating non-consensual sexual deepfakes could face up to two years in prison. Alongside this, the government has announced plans for a world-first deepfake detection evaluation framework, intended to establish consistent standards for assessing detection tools and technologies. Unsurprisingly, this brings it into direct conflict with platforms like Elon Musk's X and its 'Grok' AI tool, which continue to provide fertile ground for misogynistic content and far-right organising. But is creating laws and framework around criminalisation enough?

INTERREGNUM AND NEW MONSTERS

Antonio Gramsci wrote, 'The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.' Today, the monsters are not mythical. They are the capitalist class, the political elites shielded in the Epstein files, the institutions that reproduce violence while insisting on their own legitimacy.

What we are witnessing is the metastatic spread of the cancer that is dying liberal capitalism. Perry Anderson once described the conflict between neoliberalism and populism as a clash in which the former survives only by reproducing the very crises that threaten to destroy it, while the latter grows in magnitude without ever developing a meaningful strategy. That cycle of self-destruction – or, as Nancy Fraser names it, 'cannibal capitalism' – is now fully exposed.

When Francis Fukuyama declared the 'end of history', he imagined that capitalism had triumphed and that future conflicts would be fought along ethnic lines. What he did not foresee was the intensity of the breakdown we are living through – nor the technologies that would accelerate and amplify it.

What we face today is a rupture in class consent. The social contract that once stabilised the liberal order has collapsed under the weight of inequality, precarity, and political decay. The monsters are out in the open, visible to us all, shattering the illusion of moral order. This is the interregnum – a terrain that is frightening to enter, but one socialist feminist must confront head-on.

And this is precisely why we need a feminism that is rooted in class struggle. We cannot dismantle the structures that enabled Epstein, ICE, the far right, or the algorithmic machinery of misogyny without a feminism grounded in class politics. Only socialism and socialist feminism has the political substance and strategic clarity to confront these monsters, to tear down the system that produced them, and to build something new.

The old world is dying. The question is whether we will allow the monsters to inherit it – or whether we will organise, collectively and unapologetically, to shape the world struggling to be reborn.

NOT IN THE EPSTEIN FILES: AN INSTITUTIONAL BETRAYAL

Cathy Nugent

In the furore surrounding the release of millions of documents from the US government's investigations into paedophile sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, we should remain focused on the important issues: the multiple injustices suffered by the young women and girls he abused.

That focus has already been lost to subsidiary scandals. Of course the morally and politically corrupt friends of Epstein, such as Peter Mandelson, should be held to account. Much more so should those who participated in abuse or facilitated it. As should those who chose to stay connected to Epstein after he was jailed in 2008 for soliciting prostitution and soliciting prostitution from a minor. They should take a long look at themselves as they must have known that he was guilty of much more than what was on his charge sheet. However, by focusing on the injustices and the fight against those injustices we will learn a lot more.

A lot of the injustice is embedded in the method of abuse used by Epstein – sex trafficking – the crimes which led to his 2008 conviction. US federal law defines the sex trafficking of adults as the use of force, fraud or coercion to compel sex acts in exchange for money or favours. When the victims are minors (under 18 in many US states), the law doesn't require proof of fraud or coercion. It is in the nature of this crime that the victims will be poor, working-class and/or vulnerable.

Epstein 'trafficked' his victims from the run-down schools of West Palm Beach to Palm Beach, an island resort for the rich where he had a mansion. He used some of his victims as recruiters, plying them with cash.

The Florida police who initiated the first investigation, after the stepmother of one of the young women reported Epstein, at first tried to do right by these young women (although wrongly, they treated the recruiters as perpetrators). Epstein then threatened his victims and the local police and eventually the investigation was handed over to the FBI. At the point when the FBI investigators had more than forty women willing to give testimony, the state attorney shut things down.

For reasons that were never adequately publicly explained, the state attorney – Alexander Acosta, who went on to become Secretary of Labor in Trump's first administration – agreed a plea deal with Epstein's expensive lawyers. Epstein was charged with two relatively unserious offences and incarcerated in a low-security prison on a work release scheme. He subsequently told anyone stupid enough to believe him that the minor involved had lied about their age. The plea deal also included an unprecedented 'non-prosecution clause' so that he and potential co-conspirators could not be charged again for the same crimes. The full extent of his crimes – raping and sexually assaulting hundreds of victims – would not be made public.

FILTHY RICH

In the Netflix documentary series *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich*, one of Epstein's lawyers, Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz, says in so many words that the lawyers trashed the victims, depicting them as unreliable witnesses. These women were uneducated, had multiple sexual partners, took drugs... how could any reasonable person believe them? In other words the class backgrounds and difficult home lives of the victims, the things that had made them more vulnerable to abuse, were used against them.



• No Kings Protest, Washington DC, 18 October 2025

In the Netflix documentary the survivors very articulately describe how their lives had gone to shit after the abuse – because of course this would happen. Yet the state attorney's office declined to explain these hardships and complexities of real life to a jury of peers. Instead they chose to take what they called an 'unrisky' course and lock Epstein up for 13 months in what one commentator has described as 'a low grade motel'.

A further injustice is the fact that the full extent of Epstein's crimes were made obscure enough for his rich and powerful associates to pretend he had been rehabilitated. That left Epstein free to rebuild his sex trafficking operation and abuse again and again. In fact Epstein was abusing women while he was in jail.

After his release from jail, some of his associates would see him out and about with young women in their late teens or early twenties, as he often was according to a *Wall Street Journal* investigation. What on earth did they think was going on? Other friends claimed they thought Epstein had rehabilitated himself. Perhaps some people are that naïve, or more likely Epstein's wealth and connections overwhelmed their capacity or willingness to think.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, from after his release from prison right up

until his second arrest, Epstein entrapped young women, many from Eastern Europe, by promising to fund their education, and to get them jobs, especially modeling contracts. Epstein had part ownership of a modeling agency, MC2, in New York with Jean Luc Brunel – who after Epstein's death was investigated in France and charged with raping minors. Brunel was another serial sexual predator whose downfall came long after his behaviour became an open secret.

CONNECTIONS AND CONSPIRACIES

Without his connections Epstein wouldn't have been able to carry on his sexual exploitation. The fact that Epstein's depraved activities were integrated into his social network – including sometimes ordering women to submit to sex with other men – has made many on the right and some on the left circulate conspiracy theories, including antisemitic ones. For example that Epstein was a US secret agent, or, in the antisemitic version, a Mossad agent.

These so-called theories, along with the sheer volume of text in the 'Epstein files', obscure the true realities. In fact, the social problem that Epstein embodied can be summed up like this: rich and powerful men abuse and exploit because rich and powerful men have a monstrous sense

of entitlement and can often escape accountability. This is enabled by other powerful and influential people who want to benefit from the nexus of money and power created by the abuser. Anyone who wants to 'blame it on the Jews' is not only a grade-A idiot, they are doing Epstein's victims (yet another) disservice.

The reason why the investigation into Epstein was reopened and he was arrested in 2019 can be ascribed to a few reasons, including the impact of the #MeToo movement, actions brought by civil case lawyers and investigative reporting by the *Miami Herald*. But the main force which turned things around was the brave, years-long campaigning by survivors to get their testimony into the public arena. This includes:

- Virginia Giuffre's civil actions against Jeffrey Epstein, his abuse enabler Ghislaine Maxwell and the ex-prince, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor;
- A group of survivors who brought a legal action to have the 2008 plea deal ruled illegal for not consulting victims;
- Countless numbers of survivors who made complaints to the police, many of whom faced vicious threats from Epstein;
- Maria Farmer, a visual artist and survivor of Epstein's abuse, who – having spent many years hiding from him – spoke out publicly against him and Maxwell in 2019.

A final injustice for the survivors was how Epstein's suicide stopped them having their day in court. Small wonder many campaigned for the Epstein files to be released. Whether this brings us much closer to justice remains to be seen: that so many documents were so badly redacted the names of many victims were published, while other powerful figures continue to escape accountability, does not augur well.

As Annie Farmer, sister of Maria Farmer and another survivor put it when speaking of the battle to get the Epstein files published, said, 'This is not an issue of a few corrupt Democrats or a few corrupt Republicans. This is a case of institutional betrayal. Because these crimes were not properly investigated, so many more girls and women were harmed.'

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SUPPORT IRANIAN WOMEN'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

Vicki Morris

The recent anti-regime protests in Iran built on the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests of 2022 but have been bigger and more widespread than any protests since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The massacres of protestors – probably killing tens of thousands – have also been on a far more horrifying scale than anything seen in decades.

The protests in early January covered the range of grievances of the Iranian working and middle classes: lack of democracy and basic freedoms; frustration at corruption and the regional power games of the government; the desperate economic situation, worsened by increasing international sanctions; the lack of equality, particularly of women's rights; national grievances in, for example, Kurdish areas.

The regime still has a base of popular support but it is a small minority of Iranian society and shrinking. The US is building up its naval power in the region and, it seems, recently bombed targets inside Iran. But is 'regime change' – getting rid of the Islamic regime – Trump's main goal? To judge by his behaviour in Venezuela – where he has left the ruling party in charge, just abducting its leader Maduro, and moved instead to strongarm the regime to reprivatise its oil industry, in favour of US oil companies, and cut off its support to Cuba – the US could be quite happy to keep most of the regime in charge in Iran. It would be in return for opening up the economy on terms that suit the US, stopping its nuclear programme, and stopping support for forces such as Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This is not what the protestors want.

Yes, Trump made noises that he would punish the regime for its crackdown on protestors, but he has not supported the ambitions of the last, exiled Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, to come to power as a supposed constitutional monarch, or made any promises about the sort of society he would like to see instead of the current Islamist regime.

Women's Fightback supports the recent protests in Iran, and regime change from below – our job is to support democratic forces in Iran including the small but important workers' and women's movements and those fighting for equality and democratic rights for all. Military intervention to achieve small tweaks at the top to suit the US is not the goal and could make life for ordinary Iranians worse.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND BUREAUCRATIC MODERNISATION

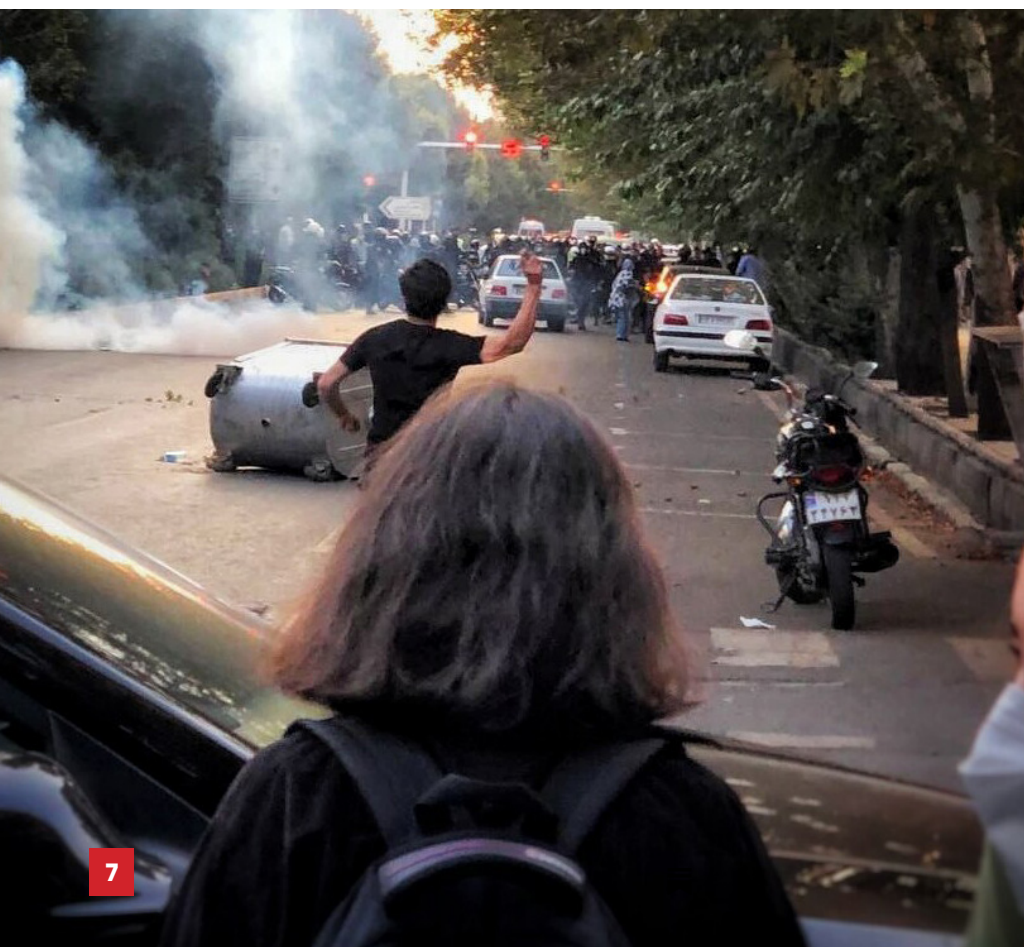
From the early 20th century, there were a small number of organisations and publications for women's rights, but democratic movements have struggled against a backdrop of dynastic struggles and imperialist (British, Russian, US) interference.

Reza Khan, a soldier, the current 'crown prince's' grandfather, took power in a coup in 1921, and in 1925 became 'shah' [king], founding the Pahlavi family dynasty that lasted till the 1979 revolution.

Reza Shah modernised and secularised Iranian society but was despotic, relying on the support of the military. He encouraged education and the participation of women in public life, but his measures included forcing 'European' dress on women and men. Pious Muslim women were forbidden to wear the veil in public, and men had to wear 'Pahlavi' hats with a brim that got in the way during prayer. Religious institutions were suppressed. Kurdish traditional dress, literature, dance and language were suppressed along with other national minorities, in favour of the promotion of Persian culture.

Iran was neutral at the start of the Second World War and the Allies invaded in 1941. Reza Shah abdicated and went into exile, his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi being installed as the new Shah. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ruled with a democratic parliament until 1953. In 1951, Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh nationalised the important British-owned

• Tehran, 2022. Women, Life Freedom Protests.



oil industry. A British and US backed coup in 1953 overthrew Mosaddegh and supported putting Pahlavi in sole charge; he let foreign oil countries back into Iran.

Similar features marked the Shah's rule to that of his father: modernisation, industrialisation, secularisation, women's increased economic and social participation, Persian chauvinism, lack of democracy and brutality, and land reform.

Secularisation, women's participation, and land reform offended and undermined the clerical class and Islamic leaders, chief among them Ruhollah (Ayatollah) Khomeini. Khomeini returned to Iran from exile during the revolution of 1979 that overthrew the Shah and subsequently took power. The clerical, Islamist regime he established has shaped women's fate in Iran to this day.

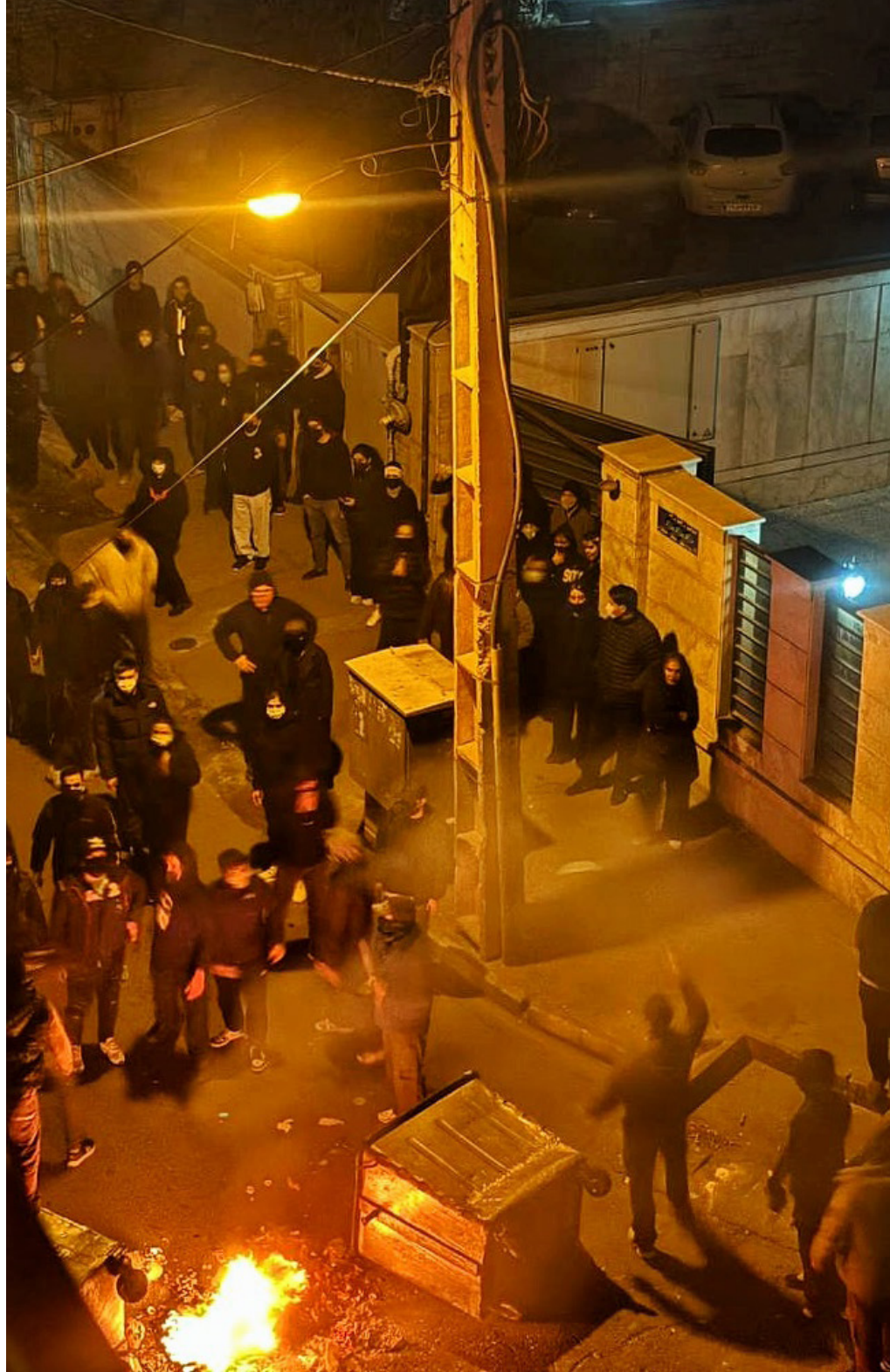
1979 REVOLUTION AND ISLAMIST TAKEOVER

Women participated in the 1979 revolution, around their own demands, and also as an important component of left-wing organisations.* But the revolution was hijacked by the Islamists led by Khomeini, and left organisations did not do enough to stop him, not recognising the danger. The Islamic regime soon cracked down on women's equal participation in public life.

Despite brave protests and resistance, since 1981 it has been compulsory in Iran for women and girls over the age of nine to wear hijab in public, alongside many other restrictions and attacks on their lives and opportunities. (Men also face restrictions on their dress and lives, though nowhere near as severe.)

WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM

Following the murder of a young woman Jina (Mahsa) Amini in September 2022 by religious police for not wearing a 'proper' hijab, a mass movement erupted around the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom'. The movement was eventually repressed, with more than 550 killed and 25,000 arrested, but hijab laws have since been less strictly enforced in big cities, and are routinely flouted. Quite apart from the repressive regime, Iranian society is patriarchal like most others, and in many ways worse, but the galvanisation of the anti-regime movement, men and women, around explicitly feminist slogans is encouraging for the future. This was a movement of all Iranians for women's freedom.



•Tehran protestors, 8 January 2026

Women's organisation and resistance has continued but is severely repressed. There is a significant strand of Islamic feminism, which seeks to improve the position of women through more liberal interpretations of Islamic teaching. However, this could be compatible with keeping Islamists in power, albeit more moderate ones. But the predominant strand of feminist sentiment is anti-regime and anti-Islamist; the most widely heard chants on protests in recent years are 'death to the dictator', 'death to Khamenei'.

Iran has a relatively young population; women and men want to live freely,

to choose what to wear, who to see, whether to party, and to be able to have jobs that pay their bills and offer them a decent standard of living. Socialists and feminists outside Iran must support them to build the organisations that can bring that about.

*For more on women's participation in the events of 1979-81, see: bit.ly/iran5days.

ICE AND ITS STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: A GENDERED ANALYSIS

Dominika Szarek

On 7 January 2026, Renée Good was a 37-year-old writer, poet, partner, and mother living in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her wife, Rebecca, and their six-year-old son. She had won an undergraduate poetry prize at Old Dominion University for her piece 'On Learning to Dissect Fetal Pigs'. She hosted a podcast, made art, and shared her love of reading and writing with her community. An ordinary woman in the best sense – someone whose life was full, creative, and deeply rooted in care.

But that morning was not ordinary. Renée and her neighbours had been living under the constant presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in their area, especially around the dual-language elementary school where families gathered each day. On 7 January, ICE officers were again active in the neighbourhood. Their vehicle reportedly became stuck in the snow, prompting additional agents to arrive. Residents later said they had anticipated ICE activity and were watching the streets.

Renée was returning home after dropping off her son when she encountered the commotion. An ICE agent, Jonathan Ross, approached her vehicle, recording her while wearing a mask and tactical gear. Renée remained calm, telling him she

wasn't angry. Her wife, also recording, tried to de-escalate the situation. The agent ordered Renée to exit the car. She instead attempted to move her vehicle away, while her wife shouted 'Drive, baby, drive!' As Renée moved away with her car, the agent fired at her. Her car crashes, and Ross says 'you fucking bitch' after shooting her.

You fucking bitch. Those were the exact words, after he murdered a woman who posed no threat to him in broad daylight. Good suffered four gunshot wounds; two in the chest, one in the forearm, and one in the head. Ross approached the vehicle, witnessing that Good was covered in blood. He then returned to other ICE agents stationed at the street requesting to call 911. A nearby resident who witnessed the incident pleaded with the officers to let him provide medical assistance, urging them to check her condition and identifying himself as a physician. He was not allowed to approach. Rebecca Good, traumatised and in shock, was also forced to stand back, unable to reach the vehicle where her wife – the person she loved the most – lay in critical condition. Six minutes later an ambulance took Renée to hospital, where she died from her injuries.

I've watched that video more times than I can count, and I still struggle to comprehend the level of brutality it

shows. The sentence that came out of Ross's mouth is instantly recognisable to any woman who has experienced male violence in its many forms – the tone, the entitlement, the justification. He killed her because she made him angry. He killed her because he could.

And now he stands backed by an institution, protected by the regime itself. Ross did this openly, in public, with multiple cameras recording. If that is what he's willing to do in full view, what can we even begin to imagine happens behind closed doors in detention centres, where there are no cameras, no witnesses, and no accountability?

ICE's structure and practices reflect deeper patterns within the political and economic order, where state power is often exercised in ways that disproportionately harm marginalised communities. For those who have long viewed ICE as a racist and misogynistic institution, Renée Good's death is yet another symptom of a system that treats lives as expendable if they do not obey. Disobedience is punished in the most gruesome ways on ordinary days like this.

ICE AND ITS VIOLENT MISOGYNY

Despite how immigration is portrayed in mainstream media, migration is an inherently gendered process. While men make up the majority of those formally deported, women and girls experience the most dangerous and vulnerable aspects of these enforcement practices.

Globally, women constitute roughly half of all migrants. In Central America, they account for about 49 percent of the region's 16.2 million migrants. Like men, women flee war, poverty, and economic precarity. But they also escape gender-based violence and deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that restrict their basic freedoms. For many, the US appears to offer a safer alternative – not a perfect one, but a place where they might find protection that is absent at home.

However, recent policy decisions have undermined even these limited avenues of safety. Cuts to international aid programmes – many of which previously supported women and girls facing gender-based violence – have left communities with fewer resources and fewer options. The result is a migration landscape where women continue to bear the brunt of danger, both in the countries they flee and in the systems they encounter upon arrival.

ICE raids frequently target community



• Minnesota, 12 July 2019, Lights For Liberty Vigil

miscarry in her cell. Osaff's report further details a culture of violence, highlighting 41 official reports of sexual and physical assault in just a few months.

STERILISATION IN DETENTION CENTRES

Sterilisation has long been one of the most disturbing aspects associated with immigration detention in the United States, predating the current intensification of ICE operations. On 14 September 2020, Project South and four other human rights organisations filed a whistleblower complaint on behalf of detained immigrants at the Irwin County Detention Center in Georgia, alongside nurse Dawn Wooten. The complaint raised serious concerns about the frequency with which hysterectomies were reportedly performed on immigrant women in ICE custody.

This story is not new. Like other colonial powers, the United States has a long and troubling history of carrying out non-consensual sterilisation procedures on women who did not fit the idealised model of white womanhood. During slavery, Black women were subjected to reproductive control and medical experimentation. After abolition, the sterilisation of so-called 'undesirable' women – not only Black women but also Latina, Puerto Rican, and Indigenous women – continued well into the twentieth century. The notorious 'Mississippi appendectomies,' a term used

to describe unnecessary hysterectomies performed in Southern teaching hospitals, are one example of how widespread these practices were. Given this history, should we really be surprised that similar patterns emerge in institutions with vast, unaccountable power?

While I have not found contemporary data confirming recent sterilisation complaints within ICE facilities, the expansion of enforcement powers and the climate of fear surrounding detention make it far more difficult for complaints to surface. We are left facing the grim reality of a system in which whistleblowing is sadistically suppressed and abuses are more easily silenced.

Given this story of abuse, many immigrant women choose to return to their home countries, even when they originally fled to escape patriarchal violence. In reality, this is not a genuine choice. For many women – particularly working-class women of colour – such choices are structurally constrained under capitalism, where even its most liberal forms tend to reproduce their harshest and most violent expressions.

ICE did not emerge with any single administration; it operated under Biden and under Obama as well. Even when presented in a more softened form, the underlying violence does not vanish. It remains embedded, legitimate, and active until it reaches a cataclysmal point.

THE BIG PICTURE

How many more individuals must suffer such an unimaginable fate before it is recognised that state-sanctioned violence inevitably breeds further tragedy, a tragedy that not only affects the most vulnerable?

Just as it felt like the horrors unfolding across the Atlantic could not intensify, another brutal killing surfaced. Alex Pretti, a man who was carrying a firearm he was legally licensed to possess – which is a protected right under the US Second Amendment – became the latest victim of a fatal encounter with enforcement.

The video footage of the incident is chilling. It shows Pretti already restrained on the ground by ICE agents. One officer is seen removing Pretti's firearm, rendering him completely disarmed. Despite being neutralised and under the physical control of the agents, Pretti was then shot several times. This act of lethal force against a restrained, disarmed man raises urgent questions about the lack of accountability and the escalating aggression defining immigration enforcement.

With Trump's second term and his so-called 'Big Beautiful Bill,' ICE was able to expand its very foundations, empowering agents who act not only with arrogance but with a sense of impunity to commit acts of violence against civilians. These are not limited to those who differ in race or gender, but extend to anyone who dares dissent against institutions that operate through cruelty and repression. The sheer presence of ICE now permeates everyday life, invading even the psyche of those who might otherwise be considered aligned with the system. What America is enacting today is what can be described as the imperial boomerang: the return of methods of domination deployed abroad, now turned inward against its own population.

This is not an invention of Trump alone. ICE should be understood as a broader symptom of capitalism shaped by a long colonial legacy. Its violence is not an aberration but an expression of the systems that created it. The only path forward is to learn to see the world through a different set of lenses – ones which our society has not yet fully developed, and which require us to imagine structures beyond the limits of the present order.

ON ANTI-TRANS RHETORIC: WHOSE SAFETY MATTERS?

Nelsey

Women's and children's safety matters. Obviously. Unless you are a fascist, a feudalist, Maggie Thatcher, or otherwise quite awful, everyone's safety should matter by virtue of being a person.

However, the safety of women and children is a prominent lens through which transphobic rhetoric has flourished in the UK in recent years. A number of anti-trans lobby groups, including perhaps most notably Sex Matters, posit themselves as human rights charities which 'protect children from trans ideology' and defend women's rights. It is totally false that the safety of women and children is in conflict with the safety or existence of trans people. So, let's talk about safety.

PUBERTY BLOCKER BAN: A THREAT TO CHILDREN'S SAFETY

The internationally-criticised 2024 Cass review of young people's gender identity services has resulted in a ban on

prescribing puberty blockers to treat gender dysphoria (but not for early-onset puberty) in under-18s. The puberty blocker ban means that trans children who know that they are trans from a young age will be forced to go through the 'wrong' puberty, which will have permanent effects that will shape the rest of their lives. To contextualise just how important this is, 92% of trans children have thought about taking their own life, and 45% have attempted it (Stonewall, 2017); but with gender-affirming medical care and interventions involving hormone blockers, trans young people's mental health can be improved to bring them in line with their cisgender peers (Miesen et al., 2020). Simply put, access to gender-affirming healthcare saves and improves the lives of young people.

The Cass review has also led to further harmful delays in the form of new guidance which lists autism and ADHD assessments as a prerequisite for youth seeking gender-affirming NHS care. Waiting lists for autism and ADHD are often years long: a 2024 report from the

Children's Commissioner, which describes the current system as 'broken', found that 41% of children waited over two years for their neurodevelopmental diagnosis, of which 17% waited over four years. These additional delays mean that children will be effectively unable to receive any kind of gender-affirming care. To add to this, why does it matter if a young trans person is autistic or has ADHD? Surely we cannot accept the implication that neurodiverse children lack the self-awareness and/or autonomy of their neurotypical peers. It is baseless, unfounded, infantilising and frankly ludicrous to argue that trans youth cannot be trusted to know who they are, nor given permission to seek care that affirms who they are.

POLICING THE USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES: A THREAT TO WOMEN'S SAFETY

There is no evidence that excluding trans people from spaces that align with their gender improves public safety. In healthcare, current practices typically allow people to use the gendered spaces appropriate to them, and it works: an investigation found that, between April 2020 and June 2022, not a single complaint was made across over a hundred NHS trusts about transgender women in women-only wards. More recently, a 2025 Freedom of Information request to Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust found that there had been no complaints about transgender people in single-sex wards.

More broadly, transgender women have been accessing most women-only services in the UK for decades, and there does not seem to be any evidence that trans women have harmed other women at a rate any higher than that at which cisgender women have harmed each other. A 2021 UK study found that small numbers of trans women attended most services for female abuse survivors in North East England; their report found that 'most staff and service users strongly believed that trans women do not present a particular or heightened risk,' and 'the vast majority of cis service users were supportive of trans women using their service.'

Much of the cultural rhetoric emboldening the removal of trans women from women's spaces assumes trans women to be threats to other women. In reality, incidents of men 'pretending' to be women to access female spaces with criminal intent are exceedingly rare.





Furthermore, ONS statistics show transgender people are twice as likely to be victims of crime than cisgender people. A Galop study found 7% of trans people in the UK have experience sexual assault, compared to 2.9% of the general population. It should go without saying that incidents of harassment by anyone, whether cisgender or transgender, should be dealt with seriously, but it would be both incorrect and outrageously bigoted to assume that trans people are any more likely to be perpetrators.

Despite this, health secretary Wes Streeting demanded last year – in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling in April that the definitions of ‘sex’, ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in the Equality Act 2010 refer exclusively to ‘biological sex’ – that the NHS bar trans people from beds in single sex wards, while the Equalities and Human Rights Commission threatened to sue the NHS if it does not update guidance.

The latter is hardly surprising since the EHRC’s non-binding ‘interim update’ reached far beyond the scope of the judgement and included legally incorrect or misleading claims. The update, which has since been quietly withdrawn, suggested that workplaces and service providers should segregate exclusively based on ‘biological sex’ unless separate

unisex facilities are available. It also stated that, in certain cases, a trans person could also be denied access to toilets matching their sex assigned at birth due to their appearance, instead insisting that they must use mysterious and elusive ‘third spaces’. It is unclear how they expect trans people to use facilities where ‘third spaces’ do not exist. It is even less clear how this would have any positive impact on the safety of cisgender women, and is more likely to result in more hostility in gendered spaces.

The use of the term ‘biological sex’ means that the logic of the ruling is deeply flawed. Since sex – made up of each individual’s variation across chromosomes, genitalia, sex characteristics, hormones and internal anatomy – is more bimodal than binary, many people find themselves outside of the two common categories at some point in their lives. The EHRC’s guidance fails to account for intersex people and for the reality of trans and gender diverse people, rendering it potentially unenforceable. We might assume that the use of ‘biological sex’ assumedly indicates sex marker as assigned at birth in this instance, but its plain inaccuracy for the realities of many can only be explained by the term acting as a ‘gender critical’ (i.e. transphobic) dogwhistle. The choice of language is perhaps unsurprising since

a recent FOI request revealed extensive communications between EHRC senior staff and anti-trans pressure group Sex Matters.

More unisex facilities would be a good thing, but it would be wrong to assume that there is never any need for gendered facilities. In the absence of being able to provide private rooms and facilities for each individual, allowing people to determine for themselves which facilities they should use – which until the past year has been standard practice – is the only realistic way to avoid policing and harassment. The EHRC update’s interpretation of the ruling is unlikely to be enforceable without illegally discriminating against trans people and breaching the Human Rights Act’s right to privacy.

This is especially the case for toilet facilities, given their built-in privacy (cubicles) and the potential impact on parents with young children, for example. The policing of facilities users would lead to an increase in harassment in public life of anyone deemed to look ‘unusual’ or less ‘feminine’, including not just trans women but also cisgender (non-transgender) women with strong features, tall stature, large or muscular frame, cropped hair, a double mastectomy, or facial hair from e.g. puberty, PCOS or menopause. Such harassment could disproportionately affect Black and brown women, since Western ideas of femininity are Eurocentric and shaped around whiteness, as well as cisgender queer women such as butch lesbians.

In fact, we are already seeing the knock-on impact of the EHRC’s update despite its lack of legal backing. Gatekeeping has become markedly more widespread as inconsistent messaging has been understood by many members of the public as permission to inappropriately challenge people in gendered spaces (TransActual, 2025). Incidents of challenging or refusal of entry have already led to both transgender and gender-nonconforming cisgender women avoiding gendered facilities, which has significant consequences on health, work and social participation. The impact has so far been greatest on more visibly gender-nonconforming people and those with a disability or long-term condition status. Cisgender masculine women have also been regularly misidentified and targeted. As early as August 2025 the *Guardian* reported on instances of cisgender women facing aggression, verbal abuse and being screamed at and

spat on when using gendered facilities. Any kind of policing or challenging practice which forces women to prove themselves likely falls short of the Equality Act's requirement of any exclusions being a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'. Such practices breach privacy, expose workers and patients to discrimination and harm, and further marginalise trans and nonbinary individuals as well as many cisgender women by creating unsafe and hostile environments in workplaces and public spheres.

Making something as fundamental as using public facilities so contentious will likely force many trans people out of public spaces and public life. The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention issued in June 2025 a 'Red Flag Alert' for trans and intersex rights in the UK: their ninth identified pattern of genocide, which is denial and/or prevention of identity, outlines how genocide can take the form of not only killing but also obstructing and erasing from public life. There is a very real threat to the safety of any woman who might be forced to prove herself, and most significantly to the safety of trans women.

SYSTEMIC FAILINGS: A THREAT TO TRANS SAFETY

When considering safety, the broader context of a years-long or even decades-long waitlist for just a first appointment at a gender identity clinic makes matters worse. On top of the impact of waitlists

on mental health, many trans people unnecessarily spend years at greater risk of discrimination due to poor access to gender-affirming healthcare. Without a diagnosis of 'gender dysphoria' from a clinic, most trans people are already ineligible for a Gender Recognition Certificate; and if your passport or birth certificate effectively 'outs' you as trans to prospective landlords or employers, you can easily find yourself facing poverty and homelessness. This is especially dangerous since trans people are less likely to have supportive families. Of course, discriminating against a tenant or job applicant for being transgender is illegal; but in reality this does very little to stop it happening. Couple this with the fact that a lack of access to gender-affirming healthcare exacerbates vulnerability to increased harassment and social exclusion, and the picture is dire.

The current rollback of trans rights coincides with attacks on disability, reproductive and migrant rights and exemplifies the rise of the far right. Even the left is permeated by transphobia. Trans people are scapegoated for the stripping away of women's rights, and – in the spirit of misogyny – they are reduced to their sexual anatomy. In reality, it is the right who are threatening reproductive rights, normalising violence against women and girls, and disempowering women through aggressive misogyny; and they are doing it in the name of 'defending the women and children'. Make no mistake: those who blame trans people for the plights of women or

argue that they are a threat to cisgender women's and children's safety and privacy are sorely mistaken, and by pedalling this false rhetoric they are contributing to the growing hate.

As class struggle feminists we must continue calling, first and foremost through our workplaces and trade unions, for employers not to comply with the guidance, and to take on the ensuing legal battle. This must be paired with a broader campaign to change legislation to enshrine self-identification in law, as well as recognising non-binary genders and intersex people, vastly expanding trans healthcare, and removing the ban on puberty blockers for trans kids.

We should demand that employers work with unions to develop and implement gender-inclusive policies urgently. We can also campaign for trans, non-binary and gender-diverse people to have better access to necessary health services through flexible workplace policy, we must push for policies that keep staff ID up-to-date and give workers access to trans inclusion training. Our union branches should be unapologetically supporting Trans Pride events and demonstrations, including by promoting them, supporting with stewarding, and protecting the demo from far right hostility wherever possible.

After all, the fight for trans liberation is a part of the fight for the liberation of all workers and all women.

• Credit: Steve Eason via Flickr.



FREE GOOGLE ADS FOR ANTI-ABORTION GROUPS

Annie Lawson-Foley

In late November 2025, Scottish newspaper *The National* reported that Google had given thousands of pounds worth of free advertising to anti-abortion groups. The groups are registered charities and therefore qualify for Google Ad Grants, a scheme which gives non-profit organisations up to £7000 a month in free adverts. As a result, adverts for pregnancy crisis helplines appeared alongside Google search results. The adverts appear to offer neutral advice or services – such as free pregnancy testing – and do not show any link to the anti-abortion ideologies of the organisations running them.

One organisation, Pregnancy Crisis Helpline, offered ‘a safe, confidential place to talk through your feelings

and your choices’. The helpline was co-launched by Christian Concern, an evangelical group that campaigns for the banning of abortion in the UK. Its website calls Stella Creasy’s amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill to decriminalise abortion for a woman acting in relation to her own pregnancy ‘evil’, stating ‘this law has no place in a civilised society’. Life, the group offering free pregnancy testing, has previously falsely linked abortion to breast cancer, mental illness, and increased suicide risk.

These adverts deliberately mislead Google users. Groups with a history of peddling medical misinformation, and who are fundamentally opposed to abortion, will not offer unbiased advice. They risk causing confusion and delay in receiving legitimate advice or treatment.

Members of Scottish Parliament have condemned Google for awarding these grants. Abortion Rights UK have called on Google to tighten rules about which organisations can advertise to users seeking abortion care, prioritise medically verified sources, suspend advertising privileges for groups that have spread false or harmful health information and increase transparency around the eligibility and oversight of charities using Ad Grants for health related advertising.

BIG TECH

This controversy highlights the power that Google and other large tech companies wield in deciding what we are shown – and not shown – online. The search results we receive when we Google something are not randomly decided or free from the influence of capital.

This is not the first time search engines have been in hot water for the way they have displayed information about reproductive health. In 2015, Google awarded \$120,000 in ad grants to Obria Group. The group runs a network of crisis pregnancy clinics (CPCs), which seek to deter pregnant visitors from having abortions, funded by Catholic organisations.

There is also money to be made. In 2023, the *Observer* and the *Citizens* revealed Facebook had been paid an average of £117,000 that year by Right to Life UK for adverts. In 2020 and 2021, when attempts were made in parliament to fully decriminalise abortion, the group ran paid anti-abortion adverts on Facebook.

CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTRES

The Pregnancy Crisis Helpline, and the services offered by other anti-abortion organisations, fall under the category of crisis pregnancy centres. Like their adverts, the centres often appear as impartial organisations. They present as medical centres, and may offer some medical services, but their aim is to dissuade pregnant people from having abortions. A 2023 *Panorama* documentary detailed how CPCs spread misinformation about the safety of abortions. In *Coercion* (reviewed later in this issue of *Women's Fightback*), Kylie Cheung highlights the role that CPCs play in the USA's post-Roe reproductive landscape. Cheung reports that in the first two years after the overturning of ‘Roe v. Wade’ state governments gave CPCs almost \$500 million in funding. CPCs prey on vulnerable people during a time which

• London, 2025 March for Life counter protest



is likely to cause stress and anxiety. In the USA, where healthcare is private, most visitors to CPCs are young and on low incomes. CPCs cause confusion and distress, and mislead individuals until they are past abortion term limits. Their veneer of medical legitimacy also causes harm. Cheung relates the story of a woman who consented to receiving an invasive ultrasound at a CPC, unaware that the worker who did this was not a medical professional. Believing the CPC was a medical facility, she was also willing to provide her contact details and was bombarded with calls after her visit until she blocked the centre's number.

It's worth noting that the charitable status of CPCs, or the organisations that run them, has led to them accessing other charitable funds, including in the past from the UK government. An investigation by Amnesty International UK revealed that CPCs had received support from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Conservative government's Coronavirus Community Fund during the pandemic.

MASKS OFF

Digital technologies and social media are pervasive and ever-present in our lives. For those born after the millennium, it may well feel like they have always been around. But these technologies are not ephemeral digital things, existing somewhere 'out there' in cyberspace. They make up a digital infrastructure, owned and run largely by private businesses, who as such hold immense power in deciding what we see online, and in turn, what we think and do in the 'real world'. Like any other form of infrastructure or industry, its ownership is not fixed. This story highlights the need for a democratically-run internet.

CPCs work to confuse, mislead and pressure pregnant people into continuing pregnancies they might not want. Their charitable status is questionable, although not surprising. So many organisations are registered as charities that we might not give much thought to what this means in practice. In this case, charitable status helps legitimise CPCs and spread their influence with free advertising and other grants. We must not allow CPCs to continue to masquerade as unbiased, semi-medical establishments. Last summer, the law was amended so that people in England and Wales can no longer be prosecuted for ending their own pregnancy. However, abortion remains a criminal offence, and the fight for full reproductive rights is far from over.

Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association

RENT STRIKE AGAINST INCREASES

WE ARE NOT REMOVING

"MRS BARBOUR'S ARMY": THE 1915 GLASGOW WOMEN'S RENT STRIKE

Nelsey

In early 1915, less than a year into the First World War, Glasgow's working class was facing a housing crisis. Housing had already been a major concern for the city's tenement housing residents, primarily industrial labour men and their families, since the late 19th century. Many homes were in a state of disrepair. Then, between 1912 and 1915, jobs in shipyards and munitions factories drew around 70,000 more to Glasgow's industrial areas. Only around 1,500 new homes were built to accommodate them.

Glasgow had quickly become Britain's most overcrowded city, and the surge in housing demand did not go unnoticed by landlords. In fact, the chair of the Landlords' Association, Mr Speirs, had circulated a memo declaring that it was 'a time for raising rents'. Many tenants at the time were women whose husbands were away at war and could not afford rent increases on top of skyrocketing food prices.

In February, landlords across the city notified tenants of an immediate 23% rent hike. Between January and March 1915 there were 6,441 evictions, marking a dramatic increase from the 738 evictions in August-September 1914. Tenants had very limited recourse to resist the

landlords' bailiffs, political connections and court backing. Nonetheless, a number of working class women began to organise against the rent increases, and February 1915 also saw the beginnings of Glasgow Women's Housing Association (WHA).

The WHA started in Govan, as South Govan Women's Housing Association, under the chairing and organising of Mary Barbour. Barbour was a socialist who had joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1896 and was involved in various organisations throughout her life, including the Scottish Cooperative Women's Guild and Socialist Sunday Schools. It was her idea to focus efforts on the people who were most often

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home during the day and had the time to organise effectively: women. This was especially important given the wartime restrictions on workplace strike action. Barbour worked alongside fellow woman activists from the ILP including Helen Crawford (a former suffragette who left the WSPU in protest at its support of the First World War, and later left the reformist ILP for the Communist Party), Agnes Dollan (who co-founded the Women's Peace Crusade alongside Crawford and Barbour), and Jessie Stephen (who went on to become one of the most active members of Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Suffrage Federation and the first woman president of Bristol Trades Council). The movement spread across the wider Clydeside area. Glasgow Women's Housing Association became colloquially known as Mrs Barbour's Army.

Housing action escalated in March 1915, when a landlord tried to evict the wife of a soldier based on debts amounting to one pound. Led by prominent ILP member John Wheatley, hundreds of outraged neighbours blocked the way into her home and prevented her eviction. By May, a rent strike organised by GWhA was kicking off. Soon around 25,000 Glaswegian tenants were refusing to pay increased rents. It was the first of its kind in Europe.

The Women's Housing Association hosted regular organising meetings, often in

members' homes or tenement closes; and cards were placed in windows announcing 'RENT STRIKE. WE ARE NOT REMOVING.'

The women organised protests in which they wore signs as placards, with slogans like 'Partick Tenants' Strike. Our Husbands, Sons and Brothers are fighting the Prussians of Germany. We are fighting the Prussians of Partick. Only alternative: MUNICIPAL HOUSING.' But perhaps their most effective action was in resisting eviction. A woman, acting as a sentry, would sit with a bell in the neighbourhood or tenement close on lookout while other women went about their household tasks; whenever the bailiff's officer arrived to evict a tenant, she would ring the bell. The other women would descend on him: first to attempt to shame and/or cajole him into not evicting the tenant, and then to stand in the way and hurl flour bombs (paper bags full of flour), wet clothes, rotting fruit and other missiles at him until he gave up. It's said that they would also pull his trousers down to force a retreat.

The tactics were highly effective, and the rent strike inspired men in nearby factories to strike for higher wages as well. By Autumn, similar rent protests were popping up in Dundee, Aberdeen and a handful of major industrial cities in England. Autumn also saw a further escalation of Glasgow's rent strike movement when, in Govan, a housing

factor (an intermediary between landlord and tenant) convinced a woman to pay the rent increase by lying that the other tenants had paid. Word of this got to Mary Barbour, who brought thousands of shipyard workers to the street of the housing factor's office to demand the return of the money. The woman was promptly given her money back.

Apparently undeterred by events in Govan, on 17 November 1915 a factor in Partick decided to prosecute 18 non-paying tenants whose rents had been put up. Most of these involved shipyard, engineering and munitions workers. In response, industrial workers from Parkhead Forge steelworks and other workplaces across the city went on strike in support of the tenants and against increasing rents. They sent deputations to the court, and their terms were clear: if the tenants were prosecuted, they would refuse to go back to work. Thousands of women and workers remained at the courts all day. Between ten and twenty thousand in total marched with a band of tin whistles, hooters and a large drum, holding placards: 'RENT STRIKERS. WE ARE NOT REMOVING'. The Sheriff Court did not like the look of this.

The combined industrial and housing protests were highly impactful at challenging the authority of landlords and the state. The government was concerned about the protests growing into a national movement, and about the impact of solidarity strikes on war efforts. When the Sheriff Court telephoned the wartime coalition government's Munitions Minister, Lloyd George, for support, he advised that the city drop the charges that same day and promised that the government would act. Celebrations outside the court lasted for hours.

Less than a month later, on 25 December 1915, the government's response – the Rent Restriction Act – received royal assent. The Act froze rents at 1914 levels for the duration of the war plus six months unless improvements were made to a property.

While one of the movement's key original goals of municipal housing was not achieved, Glasgow's 1915 women's rent strike is widely considered one of the most successful examples of working-class direct action in Scottish history.

AI AND THE ERASURE OF CONSENT:

LAURA BATES' ESSENTIAL NEW BOOK

Dominika Szarek

Capitalism continually produces industries and products that add little value to society or to our quality of life. AI is developing at extraordinary speed and, used responsibly, could genuinely benefit us by taking over mundane tasks and freeing people from unnecessary labour. As socialists, this potential shouldn't be dismissed; our aim is greater freedom from the commodified labour that capitalism forces upon us.

But that ideal is blocked by the system itself. Within capitalism, even promising technologies are quickly redirected toward trivial, exploitative, or harmful ends. Instead of serving collective wellbeing, AI often reinforces the desires shaped by a system built on accumulation, misogyny, and racism.

It is no surprise, then, that AI has entered the most intimate parts of our lives – sex. This is the focus of Laura Bates's new book, *The New Age of Sexism: How the AI Revolution is Reinventing Misogyny*. Bates examines how emerging technologies reproduce and amplify the misogyny already embedded in society, raising urgent questions about power, exploitation, and the future of intimacy under capitalism.

The book opens with deepfakes, one of the most alarming developments in AI. These AI-generated images, videos, or audio clips can depict real people with uncanny realism. Harmless examples – like a viral video of a kangaroo being denied boarding on a plane – show how easily people are fooled. But the same technology can fabricate political announcements, incite panic, or spread dangerous misinformation.

More disturbingly, deepfake tools have long been used to create non-consensual sexual images of women. Bates highlights the case of Almendralejo in Spain, where 20 girls were targeted after classmates generated fake nude images of them using an app called ClothOff. This is

not an isolated incident. In 2023, Twitch streamer Atrio accidentally revealed he had viewed deepfake porn of female colleagues, causing significant distress and long-term psychological harm.

Bates also examines sexual harassment in the metaverse – often dismissed because it happens in a 'not-real' world – and the rise of AI-powered sex dolls. These technologies reduce women to interchangeable parts and create commercial spaces where misogyny is normalised.

Manufacturers frequently design these dolls to appear childlike or 'youthful,' using descriptions like 'innocent,' 'tight,' and 'schoolgirl.' This reinforces patriarchal ideals that women are most desirable when stripped of adult features. Bates notes that such 'idealised' robots risk reshaping men's expectations of intimacy, distancing them from real human connection.

Dehumanisation is a recurring theme. Bates cites reviews from men who praise dolls for allowing them to avoid being considerate or emotionally engaged. Many describe real women as 'manipulative' or 'nagging,' framing dolls as a way to bypass consent entirely. Some users even request dolls modelled on women they hate, or use them to enact rape fantasies. Manufacturers defend this as a 'safe outlet,' but in reality these products entrench harmful attitudes rather than reduce violence.

The industry also blurs fantasy and real-world consequences, especially when dolls are dressed as nurses or secretaries – professions already facing high levels of harassment. Rather than addressing misogyny or loneliness, this market rewards and reinforces them. As Bates shows through the example of a cyber-brothel in Berlin, these spaces are overwhelmingly male and reflect a broader cultural hostility toward women.

The book left me enraged. It exposes how technologies are built around a

'Fascinating and essential... I urge you to read every syllable'
JO BRAND



straight, white, male default, turning AI into a collective assault on consent. Chapter 6, on AI 'girlfriends,' is particularly disturbing. These apps let users design an eternally compliant partner, creating what Bates calls 'an explicit and convincing illusion of a woman who is eternally subservient.' This isn't momentary domination – it's continuous, every time the app is opened. Such tools erode men's ability to see women as full human beings, replacing real relationships with a frictionless fantasy where disagreement never exists.

At the core of this book lie stark truths: dehumanisation and the deliberate evasion of consent. Tech companies are not only failing to design technology that is harmless and inclusive – they may be fundamentally incompatible with the very idea of it. Bates argues that progress does not require 'breaking some things,' a pointed rebuttal to Mark Zuckerberg's infamous mantra. But in a capitalist system where these companies operate, profit is valued far above harm reduction. The damage their technologies cause is retroactively patched over with flimsy band-aids, never meaningfully addressed. As Bates writes, AI models 'regurgitate the harms and inequalities inherent within the material... vomiting our racism and sexism and class inequality.'

Preventative thinking is almost entirely absent. As Bates repeatedly highlights, 'an overwhelming male workforce creates products that cause or facilitate unintended harm.' What we are witnessing is not just a technical failure but a systemic evasion of consent – one that

THE SUPREME COURT RULING: ONE YEAR ON THE FALLOUT FROM THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE EQUALITY ACT

Cece Stranding

It has been almost a year since the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of the protected characteristic of 'sex' in the Equality Act 2010. At the time, both the Supreme Court and the Government were quick to try and reassure trans people that they would still be provided with protections against discrimination, while also welcoming the 'clarity' brought by the ruling.

The reality is that, since the ruling, harmful rhetoric against trans people has intensified, trans people have been subject to discrimination and exclusion from an ever-expanding section of public life, and, despite the best efforts of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to rush through their discriminatory guidance, the interpretation of this ruling was so unworkable that even a Government that happily imposed a political ban on essential healthcare for trans children has been forced to sit on it, leaving the legal situation perhaps the least clear it has ever been.

TRANS-EXCLUSION

The Supreme Court ruling fired the starting gun for organisations waiting for an opportunity to exclude trans people, not least the EHRC, who drafted an 'interim update' in less than 24 hours, which not only failed to uphold protections for trans people, but also attempted to mandate discrimination against them. The EHRC have since

creates unsafe environments, especially online. For those who grew up before social media, this might sound abstract or exaggerated. But for many people, including me, the online world is not separate from daily life. If AI continues to reproduce and amplify these harms, the result will be a further shrinking of public space for women and minorities, pushing us out of the digital sphere altogether.

One criticism I had was the book's repetitiveness. As someone with a history of harassment and assault, I already expected the content to be triggering, but the density and overlap made it emotionally heavier. Chapter 5 could have been merged with the earlier deepfake chapter, and Chapters 7 and 8 would have been stronger combined, as both address how a tech sector dominated by white men reproduces discrimination far beyond sexual violence.

Ultimately, this book is an essential read, even with its occasional density. I'm still not convinced I've captured the full scope of what it covers here. It is a book that will make you angry – and perhaps push you toward action. The book is even more necessary to read considering recent legislative changes proposed by the UK government such as the recent Online Safety Act's attempts to address some of these issues. It requires platforms to implement robust age-verification systems to block children from pornography, self-harm content, and other harmful material. Sharing intimate images without consent has been designated a 'priority offence,' obliging major platforms to remove such content proactively. The government has also moved to tackle deepfakes by banning so-called

'nudification' apps.

But all of this raises a deeper question: how effective can regulation be within a system still governed by profit and demand? Online activity evolves at a pace legislation cannot match. An app can be created in minutes; once an image is generated, it can be saved, duplicated, and distributed endlessly. As Bates notes, even the Act's legal definition of 'image-based assault' remains limited, leaving significant gaps in protection.

If we want to address these issues meaningfully, we have to confront them at their root. That means reshaping boys' and men's views of women from an early age, teaching consent as a fundamental principle, and talking honestly about gender – not only its most violent expressions, but also the subtle, everyday expectations that shape behaviour. And, in the spirit of genuine transformation, it means imagining a world where capitalism is no longer the organising force of our lives.

None of this will be achieved through banning a few harmful apps or passing laws that declare something 'wrong' while leaving the underlying culture untouched. As long as misogynistic behaviour is tolerated – even normalised – in private and public life, legislation alone will not change it. What we need is sustained conversation, collective pressure, and a willingness to challenge the systems that make this violence possible in the first place.



taken down this update, but the service providers that were just looking for cover to start imposing exclusions on trans people had already done so, and have not been perturbed by the withdrawal of the update.

Some of the first exclusions came in the form of 'bathroom bans', specifically workplace toilets, which are actually not provisioned through the Equality Act, but through separate pieces of legislation, and so should not have been impacted by the Supreme Court ruling. While only some organisations have implemented such bans, and others have stuck with business as usual, trans people now have to contend with the prospect that, although they are not excluded from every bathroom, they may now be excluded from any bathroom. This impacts not only trans people's ability to freely access toilets in public spaces, but can also see them excluded from toilets in their workplaces, a particular concern for a group already facing greater barriers to accessing employment.

In the time since the ruling, trans exclusion has spread from bathrooms to other parts of life, and from organisations eager to impose exclusion to those reluctant to do so, but threatened by the prospect of potentially costly legal challenges, which have long been employed by a well-funded anti-trans movement as a means to intimidate organisations into abandoning trans

people. At the start of December, both Girlguiding and the Women's Institute released statements announcing that they will no longer admit trans girls or women as members - both stating that they did not want to make these decisions, but that they felt that they were left with no other options.

The Labour Party, complicit in this rollback of rights through failing to legislate to clearly defend protections for people's lived sex or gender identity, and with a seemingly unending eagerness to pointlessly cede ground to the right and pave the way for Reform, first postponed its Women's Conference, and then presented members with options to either cancel the conference entirely, or ban trans women from being able to vote or

take part in debates. Meanwhile, Scottish Labour have pledged to impose a blanket ban of trans women inmates (all 20 of them!) from female jails if they win the upcoming election, a policy that will win as many votes for the party as the number of problems it will solve.

BEYOND RIGHTS

All of this serves to highlight just how delicate these legal protections always were. Without any change in law or vote in Parliament, and through a court ruling that supposedly did not actually roll back any legal protections, but simply made them less clear, trans people have already lost access to a whole range of gendered spaces that they had been accessing freely, without issue, for decades.

Socialists should not be surprised by the fragility of these rights. After all, we know that it is not legislation itself that guarantees us rights, but maintaining the working-class mobilisation that won that legislation in the first place. While it is important to fight for and win back the legal protections that trans people have lost, we will always be on the defensive for as long as we fail to address the wealth inequality and unfair legal system that allow the wealthy to use legal challenges to attack the individuals, organisations, and laws that stand in their way.

Alongside pushing to amend the Equality Act to protect current lived sex and gender identity, we should be refusing to comply with or enforce trans-exclusion mandates, taking up these fights in our unions, political parties, and other organisations.



LOUD WOMEN: IN CONVERSATION WITH CASSIE FOX

Cassie Fox is founder of international intersectional feminist music CIC LOUD WOMEN and 'bass Doris' in mummycore riotpop kitchenpunch band I, Doris. She lectures at BIMM and ICMP music schools in London. Cassie spoke to Nelsey.

It's hard to describe LOUD WOMEN in a single sentence. What started as a one-off gig in 2015 quickly became a not-for-profit grassroots project with international reach. LOUD WOMEN events and festivals are now making waves both on home turf and in Canada, the US, Australia, Germany and beyond, with no sign of slowing down. Elsewhere, the LOUD WOMEN universe includes music reviews, interviews, an e-zine, a radio show, their very own Mercury Prize, and a record label releasing compilation CDs of up-and-coming DIY artists. At the heart of it is Cassie Fox.

'I came to being in bands quite late in life,' Cassie says. Before being drafted into her first band aged 32 and pregnant, she had never considered it as something she could get involved in. 'I had a musical background, I played piano, and I'd been around musicians in my life, but it took being older and surrounded by the right people to give it a go.'

It wasn't until years later that Cassie fully realised how unusual her first experience as a member of *Thee Faction*, a nine-piece socialist R&B group, had been. 'Within a couple of years we were playing Glastonbury, we played all the big trade union events, we did amazing things. I loved it, I got over the stage fright really quickly.'

'We started as all-women but now must have every gender in our lineup, particularly the drummers. We must have about 20!' But the man-band-heavy lineups on the gig circuit, macho crowds and tokenism of being the only woman band on the bill soon grew frustrating. In response, Cassie put on a relaxed, inclusive fundraising gig 10 years ago with her friends' bands - and what followed was LOUD WOMEN.

'I always felt that my voice has been quietened or I've had to struggle to have

my voice heard. Growing up being told to be quiet, don't take too much space, don't be a nuisance... LOUD WOMEN is a revolt against all that. With age I've realised more and more that that's bullshit, and I've done everything I can to support others to see that too.'

TEN YEARS OF LOUD WOMEN

Back when LOUD WOMEN first started, it felt like quite a rarity to have femme-centred gigs on the London scene - and even more so when they started teaming up with promoters up and down the country. 'For some acts it was the first time they'd played a lineup where they weren't the only women in the room,' Cassie remembers. 'Actually, we realised only when we were celebrating 10 years that we'd formed in the same year as other groups like us, like Safe Gigs for Women.'

I asked Cassie about her highlights and proudest moments so far. 'If I had my PR hat on, I'd say giving early gigs to bands like *Nova Twins* and *Lambrini Girls* who are taking over the world now.' She notes that Phoebe Lunny of *Lambrini Girls* was part of the LOUD WOMEN team for a while, often interviewing other artists for them. 'But I still get a buzz putting on gigs for bands who have really struggled to get a foot in the door, to get put on by other promoters or self-promo,' she smiles. 'So few promoters are willing to take a chance on artists who don't have a manager, who don't have perfect communication but are so talented. I'm proud that LOUD WOMEN can take a chance on those brilliant artists.'

The recurring LOUD WOMEN Sunday fixture on Rebellion Festival's introducing stage is another highlight of the past 10 years: 'It's the UK's biggest punk festival, so it can be a big stepping stone for a DIY band to get on there.'

'And last year was crazy,' Cassie adds. 'We had events all over the world, I'm still pinching myself. We've just been in Sydney and Melbourne in 2025 and it's all happening again in 2025, possibly in Brisbane too.'

'I feel like I've won the lottery sometimes.



• Loud Women Festival, 2023, Via loudwomen.com

I get to work with amazing bands, really nice people, and I get to choose the bands and put on events and pick incredible lineups. I'm constantly inspired by artists around me, by my still bright-eyed and keen students ready to go out into the world. The scene around me is really vibrant and full of talent - and more so every year. It's not getting stale at all, there are new bands coming through all the time.' The LOUD WOMEN radio show on Resonance FM every Tuesday even has a rule of only playing music that has been released in the last month. 'It's a bit of a challenge every week, but it means new bands are sending new music every week too, so I'm constantly discovering new great music.'

The London LOUD WOMEN festival at Rich Mix in Shoreditch has been all-ages for the past few years. The advantages are huge: you don't have the challenge of finding a babysitter (in Cassie's words, 'bring the kids along, have a kiddie pit at the front!'), and the kids get to hear some 'proper' music and see people on stage who look like their mum or their queer auntie. It's good for inspiring kids to get into music, too. And it has meant that younger bands can play: the *Dollheads*, a band of siblings, first played LOUD WOMEN when the youngest was around 13. Plus, all-ages events let parents dodge the nursery rhymes for a while. 'If I had my way, everything would be all ages,' Cassie explains, 'but we couldn't manage it at our New York event because venues all rely so much on alcohol sales.' This echoes the struggle faced by grassroots music venues across the board, with the UK losing a venue every fortnight as of 2025.



Cassie and I also talked about the name. 'Maybe if I were starting out now I would give LOUD WOMEN a different name as it's for all genders to feel safe and included. Even cis men feel at home at LOUD WOMEN events, which is nice even though it's not primarily for them! It's for everyone to come and have a nice time and bring their kids.' This sentiment echoes that of Spark the Noise, an organisation working with girls, women, trans and non-binary people to increase the numbers making and performing music, and who have recently changed their name from Girls Rock London for similar reasons.

MUSIC, POLITICS AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

LOUD WOMEN is intended as a platform for other people to realise that being involved in music can be accessible to everyone. 'And if it doesn't feel that way then let's change that, make our own space, and show others how it's done.' It is often said that the music industry is sharp-elbowed and nasty, but at the LOUD WOMEN end it feels like a collaborative, nice gang of people. It shows it doesn't have to be that way, and that by clubbing together you amplify everyone's voices.

It feels like there are more femme- and queer-focused projects now at grassroots level, and LOUD WOMEN has collaborated with like-minded bands, musicians and promoters to put on events around the world. But Cassie says there is still a long way to go. 'The big festival lineups are still majority all-male white bands. LOUD WOMEN is giving bands early gigs and

a foot into the music industry, but there seems to be a blockage at some point.'

It is no secret that the media and music industry often punish artists who speak out on injustices. Cassie notes Kate Nash as inspiring for bucking that trend: 'She's got a larger stage with a larger audience and isn't afraid to ruffle feathers or anger TERFs.' But within the world of LOUD WOMEN and its surroundings, it can feel like all musicians are deeply political and talking about important issues. 'Again the grassroots are leading the way, it feels like every band LOUD WOMEN puts on talks about Palestine, about America, about trans rights, and it makes it part of what you're doing on stage - why else be on a stage? You've been given a mic and an audience, it's a chance to use it for good.' Further afield, LOUD WOMEN Australia gave Cassie a glimpse into the issues supported by the Aussie DIY scene. 'There was a real show of support for First Nations people, acknowledging the land that events were held on in the right way, as well as support for trans rights and Palestine.'

As a not-for-profit, the money from LOUD WOMEN primarily goes toward paying the artists, although LOUD WOMEN has also raised money through compilation albums for Women's Aid. A particularly powerful fundraiser is their 2021 charity single *Reclaim These Streets*, which confronts violence against women and girls. The single was named after the street movement for women's safety following the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard on her way home by a Metropolitan Police officer. The collaborative project brought together 64 artists (through a blend of

remote and socially distanced measures) and featured both DIY artists and more well-known names such as Brit Smith, who in turn brought along Siobhan Fahey of *Bananarama*. Its lyrics unapologetically confront violence against women and girls. Cassie describes the experience as surreal: 'It was all DIY released on social media and it got in the charts without any music industry involvement and raised thousands for Women's Aid.'

Cassie has also lectured at music schools since 2021 off the back of LOUD WOMEN. One of the biggest barriers she sees to young musicians today is a lack of money and resources: 'Even the students who are at a music uni, with access to the equipment, are struggling to get the recording done and to get the gigs to get out there.' There's also the enormous scary beast of a music industry run by social media and trends to contend with. 'Being a young person in this weird, fucked-up world and putting yourself out there as an artist, exposing yourself, being told you have to be doing that every day and go viral and look a certain way to stand a chance... It feels like social media is making people have to be even more vulnerable and put out so much content to get where they want to be. They're spending so much time doing social media rather than the fun bit, in the studio, making music. And there are the inevitable mental health struggles that follow all that pressure too.'

LOOKING FORWARD

In 2026, LOUD WOMEN is going global again with events in Berlin, Hamburg, New York, Australia and hopefully Nova Scotia again. LOUD WOMEN frequently issue callouts for people to come on board and collaborate, and people are constantly getting in touch to suggest events in different places around the world. 'Our last post actually went a bit viral - I now have a couple of hundred new volunteers who I'll need to talk to!' Cassie is particularly looking forward to travelling, seeing a bit of the world, and discovering new bands from all over.

Her advice for any LOUD women and non-binary people who are just starting out? 'Find your community. No matter how isolated or how much of an outsider you feel, there's a whole world of people just like you out there. If you haven't found them yet, you will. LOUD WOMEN is a place to start if it resonates with you. Take up that space that you want to take up!'



REVIEW

DIR. DAVID MICHOD'S CHRISTY: POWER AND CONTROL IN WOMEN'S BOXING

Luke Hardy

Content warning: spoilers, domestic violence, sexual abuse

Sports biopics and boxing movies have long been a staple of Hollywood. First act: rise to success against the odds (probably depicted in a montage at some point), followed by a second act: struggles with demons, conflict and setbacks; before a triumphant return in the third act.

Christy, starring Sydney Sweeney, does not avoid all such tropes but, at least for this viewer, Christy Salters's story was compelling and harrowing in a way I wasn't expecting. It also tells the story of the evolution of women's boxing which in itself is interesting.

Salters came from a conservative working-class coal mining family in West Virginia. Already a sportswoman playing basketball at a state level, she was in a relationship with a teammate of which her family did not approve. She started boxing casually on the low

rent 'toughwomen' contests for a little extra money. Eventually she came to the attention of professional promoters and trainers. Her trainer Jim Martin, 25 years older than Christy, became her husband, her svengali and her abuser. Martin as played by Ben Foster is one of the most convincingly loathsome and sleazy figures I have seen depicted on a movie screen for some time. The film uses the different physicalities well, with a paunchy Foster looming over the young and diminutive Sweeney.

Martin, with the approval of her parents, erased all signs of her sexuality. He shaped Christy's image and persona to present her as a feminine housewife who happens to also fight, and in contrast to many of her less feminine-presenting and sometimes openly lesbian opponents. Christy would trash talk these other women in deeply homophobic and misogynistic ways, playing up to a reactionary boxing audience. She would reject any hint of broader advocacy for women's sport or feminism. It worked — Christy became the first female

boxer to be famous. Her big break was being promoted by Don King on the undercard of famous Mike Tyson fights. Her personality, brutal punching and enthusiastic celebrations won over fans.

The film portrays well the point where the culture of women's boxing decisively moves on from the 'Christy Martin' era, leaving her behind. For all her talent and prowess she still had the whiff of the side show attraction about her as women's boxing increasingly became a professionalised mainstream sport in which the kind of tactics used by Christy to get noticed became less necessary.

Jim Martin was abusive, controlling and violent throughout their marriage and the film shows this in harrowing detail. It got worse as her career started to falter and his control was challenged. Thankfully, Salters somehow managed to survive and now is an advocate for victims of domestic violence and is able to be open about her sexuality.

The film is not above criticism. Although it portrays Christy's relationships with other women, it felt to me to be pulling its punches and overly chaste, as though trying not to alienate a section of its audience. It criminally underuses Katy O'Brian. Still, this definitely felt like a story worth telling. The film does so effectively, and Sydney Sweeney and Ben Foster are excellent throughout.

FROM RED-PILLED TO PINK-PILLED: THE WELLNESS TO FAR RIGHT PIPELINE

Dominika Szarek

Nothing you do online is truly secret; privacy in digital spaces is almost unattainable. The most important aspect of our online presence is the algorithm – so finely tuned to our interests, likes, and desires that it shapes not only what we see but how we think.

My closest male friend, deeply immersed in the fitness and wellness industry, discovered that his engagement with workout content gradually shifted his Instagram feed toward something darker. Alongside exercise tips appeared videos saturated with hypermasculinity, framing fitness as warfare: a battle against weakness, emotion, and vulnerability. These narratives are dangerous – not only for men's mental health but also for women, as they reinforce men's hostility and 'ownership' of women.

One recurring trope is particularly revealing: clips of men lifting weights captioned with lines like, 'If you feel like quitting, remember she's with another man.' This rhetoric, rooted in 'cuck culture,' reduces heartbreak to a contest of dominance, suggesting that masculinity must be rebuilt through muscle and intimidation. It exposes how fragile the idea of manhood can be – and how easily fitness culture becomes a gateway to toxic, even extremist, ideologies.

It has been noted that the 'Dissident Right' relies on online communication to establish far-right cultural hegemony. In fact, the group of far-right influencers interested in health, fitness and nature had been dubbed under the name of 'Barbarian right'. They have utilised fitness content infused with eugenics, reactionary philosophies of beauty, and ecofascist concepts of nature.

FITNESS CULTURE AND ATHLETICISM IN THE HANDS OF AUTHORITARIANISM

There is nothing new about athleticism being harnessed by authoritarian regimes

to further their agenda. Fitness has long been intertwined with eugenic ideology, used to promote notions of racial superiority. This was particularly evident in Nazi Germany: the 1936 Berlin Olympics were staged to showcase the supposed supremacy of the Aryan race. Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels understood that the Games could serve a dual purpose, celebrating German athletic achievement while sanitising the image of the Third Reich. By presenting Germany as civilised and orderly, the regime sought to obscure its violent antisemitism, which had already forced many Jewish people to flee or face persecution.

Authoritarian regimes have repeatedly used sport to entrench obedience and foster national pride. This dynamic was later visible in East Germany, where state-controlled athletic programmes became a central propaganda tool. The regime's doping system gave athletes an advantage but left many with devastating long-term health consequences.

In today's digital landscape, dominated by platforms like Instagram, X, and TikTok, the fusion of fitness and authoritarianism has re-emerged in new forms. Not all fitness creators fall into this pattern, but a growing number blend health advice with esoteric philosophy and political commentary. Accounts such as Raw Egg Nationalist and Solbrah centre the body as a site of physical and spiritual revitalisation. They promote raw eggs, raw meat, and raw milk as keys to boosting testosterone and creating a 'real' man. Both frame environmental degradation as a threat to masculinity, which they claim is under attack from modernity and cultural shifts such as feminism. They deride veganism and equate meat consumption with manhood. Their content openly references far-right figures. The boundary between fitness and extremist ideology is not merely blurred – it is absent.

The man behind Raw Egg Nationalist, Dr Charles Cornish-Dale, published *The Last Men: Liberalism and the Death of Masculinity*, a biological counterpoint to

Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. The book argues that 'true masculinity' is becoming an endangered species due to endocrine disruptors, processed food, and a political system hostile to masculine vitality. Their accounts also promote far-right narratives about immigration, claiming that Western civilisation is being destabilised by cultural tolerance.

We can pretend this phenomenon is confined to the virtual world, but it is increasingly shaping political power – particularly in the United States. Influencers who built their followings online have entered government initiatives such as 'Make America Healthy Again.' Figures like Carnivore MD and various 'momfluencers' have promoted raw milk as both an alternative to nutritional guidelines and a substitute for vaccines. The initiative's founder is RFK Jr., now the US Secretary of Health, a long-time promoter of anti-vaccine misinformation and raw-food pseudoscience.

The idea that social media is mere white noise is no longer credible. These platforms are incubating a far-right, anti-scientific alternative reality – one that is increasingly embedded in state power and fertile ground for eugenic thinking. The danger is not abstract. It is already here.

SO, WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?

As someone who is chronically online (a proud Gen-Z with the emotional maturity of a 21-year-old), I've noticed that dieting culture and thinness are very much back in fashion. And I use the word fashion deliberately: the 'ideal' female body functions like any other trend, cycling in and out of style. When I was growing up, the ideal was curvy – flat stomach, big hips, hourglass silhouette. Now that curvaceous ideal has fallen out of favour, replaced by a renewed obsession with thinness.

It's hard not to notice how this shift overlaps with the resurgence of far-right aesthetics. As Lois Shearing notes in *Pink Pilled*, far-right communities across social platforms frame fatness as a moral failing and a symptom of modern decay – even as evidence of the 'decline' of Western civilisation. This fits neatly within a long history of fascist ideology treating the body as a site of spiritual renewal, and treating women's bodies in particular as vessels for national reproduction.

Fatness and thinness have never been neutral beauty trends; they have always



carried moral weight. It is therefore unsurprising that the thinness-obsessed content produced by many female fitness influencers has become a pipeline – often a very smooth one – into reactionary and far-right worldviews. As writer Katherine Dee has observed, if the far right presents itself as synonymous with ‘health’, ‘discipline’, and ‘self-improvement’, then supporting far-right figures can be framed as supporting one’s own physical wellbeing. Women become a key target for this messaging. They are the primary consumers of the wellness and beauty industries – industries that do not simply serve women but actively consume them, shaping their desires and anxieties. In a landscape saturated with products

promising transformation, belonging, and finally achieving the ‘ideal’ body, the line between beauty culture and political manipulation becomes dangerously thin.

Some of these influencers are as young as eighteen. Take Ava Noe, who has amassed over 25,000 followers on Instagram. Her content blends workouts with ‘what I eat in a day’ videos – the hallmark of what is now called ‘crunchy culture’. Her feed is meticulously curated to appeal to young girls, presenting a narrow vision of what ‘healthy’ looks like. Ava represents a new type of influencer: the ‘crunchy teen,’ part of a wider movement that claims to refine diets and reject processed foods. On the surface, it appears to be a good-faith wellness trend. But is it?

At its core, this is an eighteen-year-old modelling thinness as a lifestyle. This kind of content is deeply triggering for people with body dysmorphia or eating disorders – conditions that disproportionately affect young women, especially during puberty, which is precisely the demographic Ava and other ‘crunchy teen’ influencers appeal to. Doctors such as Dr Jasmine Reese have reported rising anxiety among teenagers about food, and researchers like Ms Shine, who studies online nutrition misinformation, have documented increasing stress, shame, and confusion around eating.

Alongside her fitness and ‘clean eating’

content, Ava also emphasises that she never parties, never drinks, and that her life goals are ‘my future husband, the gym, and groceries for my future kids.’ She openly describes herself as a future tradwife. This raises a troubling question: to what extent is this nutritional ‘noise’ on social media preparing young women for a nostalgic return to traditional wifehood – drinking raw milk, eating ‘artificial-free’ food, keeping their bodies thin, and appealing to the male gaze – a demographic increasingly radicalised by far-right content?

Many of the older ‘crunchy’ influencers are mothers – the so-called momfluencers – who have played a significant role in the MAHA campaign, a movement steeped in conspiratorial and anti-scientific narratives, especially around vaccines.

TRANSATLANTIC REACH

This may appear to be an American phenomenon, but with the growing popularity of Reform, it would be naïve to assume the UK is immune. The transnational influence of US wellness and tradwife influencers is already shaping British online culture. Children, teenagers, and young adults spend more time online than ever before; for many, the internet is not an escape from reality but the primary site where reality is formed. We should not be surprised – though perhaps we should be alarmed – that their capacity to question what they consume is eroding.

All of this reinforces that we need community more than ever. The online world has become a matrix of its own, spilling into our political sphere and creating a dangerous, authoritarian terrain where nostalgia and a return to the past are presented as solutions to growing alienation and socio-economic decline. The internet can be a powerful tool, but it can also be an echo chamber, especially when algorithms funnel users toward content that claims to reveal ‘the truth.’

We must stay vigilant. We must build community – spaces where people meet, talk, read, and think together. That is the only way to break this pipeline of confirmation bias and pursue a liberation that goes beyond it.

ORGANISE WITH US

Workers' Liberty members organise in our workplaces and trade unions for socialist politics and trans-inclusive, class struggle feminism. Inside Workers' Liberty, we have industrial “fractions”, corresponding to the industries in which we work, so that we can coordinate, discuss and plan our interventions, and support each other in local efforts. Our industrial fractions include: education, rail, healthcare, fire and rescue, local government and the civil service. To organise with us, write to: office@workersliberty.org.

RADICAL INTIMACY THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

Pavlina Kostarakou

It is not often that books make you want to write about them. And it is even less of an occurrence, personally, that a non-fiction book discussed in my local Socialist Feminist Book Club has filled me with a vague yet tangible optimism about what a radical, socialist future might hold. The book in question is Sophie K. Rosa's *Radical Intimacy* (Pluto Press, 2023) and this is an attempt to share some thoughts and musings around the book itself from a reader point of view and around some main themes that emerged from a very fruitful discussion we had at the November Workers' Liberty Book Club in Sheffield.

These themes explored the ways in which intimacy is shunned as a core value that could instead be prioritised when organising our public spaces and public interactions. The same approach is present even on the left. The book also highlighted the radical nature of choosing to reimagine interpersonal intimacy rather than accept a stifling reality in which closeness is shrinking, constrained by material barriers or reduced to narrow notions of sex and hedonism.

Stemming from that thought, the reframing and re-combining the existing known forms of intimacy to create new forms of intimacy beyond the transactional was formed as a potential call to action. Inevitably a few criticisms emerged, which nevertheless provided an interesting framework around the different readers' perceptions of the book. Above all, the question that epitomised the nature of the book was: Why is reimagining intimacy inherently radical – and how is it socialist? It is a question which we attempted to answer during the book club, and one I will try and address.

Anyone familiar with feminist rhetoric will find themselves agreeing with much of the book. It is structured to be comprehensive, yet it also incites



conversations about side issues and even key topics that it chooses not to cover.

Whether intentional or not, those omissions certainly inspired conversations within the book club. It could be argued that this may be the aim of the book, even if it is unintentional: to guide us to imagine what is not there (yet), what might be lacking, and that – instead of waiting to be told what action to take – we can start by reframing what we already know.

Much like a skilful therapist who allows us to reach our own conclusions and draw on our own resources to imagine solutions that are viable and sustainable to build a better life around us, Sophie K. Rosa guides our train of thought through a plethora of carefully curated citations and bibliography. (Disclaimer: after writing this line, I felt prompted to research the author only to find out she is actually training as a psychoanalyst.) Some argued that the voice of the author was lost at times, but I would argue equally that the apt citations delivered a seamless coherent message: 'don't just take my word for it, here are the receipts.' Although the book is not not a call to action per se – to the disappointment of some – it most certainly sows the seeds for us raise for questions, questions that need not necessarily have a direct or definitive answer but questions that we should keep at the forefront of our collective imagination when thinking about how to move beyond what feels unchangeable.

A pivotal aspect in the reading of 'Radical Intimacy' is its expansion of the meaning of intimacy; how it should also be used in a way that transcends its semantics around sex or hedonism or pleasure. With

that said, it also raises a further question: Why are sex and pleasure unserious or confining in this context? They simply aren't; if anything, 'Like sex, intimacy can allow us to access desire, pleasure, comfort, tending, tenderness, coming together and feelings of "being seen"'. But just as not all sex is intimate, not all intimacy is sexual' (p.2). They deserve more space as political causes; and this is one of the book's central arguments and a key takeaway.

We currently lack both the structures and the imagination to let the many forms of intimacy we experience take up political space. We rarely treat them as things worth organising around or even being outraged about – whether through their presence, their absence, or their destruction. Imagine wanting to start a peer-support group for people who have bad sex. Then imagine this peer support group organising and putting themselves forward for elections of any kind. At what point does our imagination fail to carry us from one scenario to the other, and why does that leap feel impossible?

Radical Intimacy urges us to keep asking questions like these. In doing so, it achieves something important: it reminds us that demanding a neat answer or a clear call to action matters far less than understanding which questions we need to keep asking.

But in what sense is any of this radical, or recognisably socialist? Again, concisely, Sophie K Rosa addresses the questions and pre-empts the potential criticism in her introduction, by offering the dots that one can join in their own reading and capacity: 'the personal is political', and these two realms carry resistance against capitalism through re-imagining their enmeshment. How have we come to insist on separating our personal relationships from the profit-prioritising systems that dictate them? Some might argue that

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this may read as the familiar attempt to carry all responsibility back to the individual, but in my reading, Rosa makes an important reference to the leftist past of not so long ago, where 'women's oppression[...] was frequently dismissed by male-dominated radical movements as a personal problem, as opposed to the basis for feminist solidarity' (p.5) and that '[t]he intimate realm is devalued on the left today, both in mainstream and radical ambits. This neglect not only overlooks the terrain's latent power for political movements, but sidelines many liberation struggles' (p.7). Together these points act as a reminder that the 'personal' has not quite been at the forefront, or even accepted as a central cause for solidarity even within leftist movements.

Therefore there is still considerable space to be occupied by the personal within the political realm, for it to assume its more radical form and step into itself as one unified, powerful form of resistance. This is yet to happen at a substantially intersectional level. Rosa offers a line that some linguists (but not only linguists!) would appreciate, linking the etymology of 'radical' politics and intimacy to the word 'root': 'radical' is used to refer to political radicalism: a politics with imagination and abolitionism at its core, that seeks to transform the world by getting to the root of why things are the way they are under capitalism.' (p.3)

In an eloquent, well-researched and rather elliptical manner, the author holds space for all the stifling injustice that permeates our personal relationships under capitalism, marginalising and deprioritising them since they fail to generate profit and bring only joy – which cannot be quantified or measured, and therefore holds no value. Consequently it will be starved, neglected and routinely dismissed. Themes of monogamy and heteronormative structures took centre stage in our book club discussions, stating outright how no one 'has time' under capitalism for any non-monogamous intimate arrangement, or 'the resources', and how 'it is a lot easier to just stick with one partner', how being 'polyamorous is a full time job' ('life as work', p.8). These statements present in their honest simplicity the core problem of our intimate oppression: believing that seeking different forms of intimacy is not worth our time, effort and energy. It might well be this co-opting that is the most insidious killer of a radically intimate resistance. As Rosa reminds us, attempts to organise politically around solutions to what Helen Hester calls 'the material

hegemonies of gendered life' were routinely belittled (p.5).

Understandably, criticisms were made that the author is often speaking from a Eurocentric, British-centric, white middle-class point of view, or that she is addressing such an audience; but the author never claimed to provide an all-encompassing anthropological research account where she would speak of all experiences and cultures that she had little or no empirical knowledge of. And again, we found ourselves drawing parallels with cultures beyond the British context inspired by the book. This brought up the distinction between 'coconut' and 'peach' cultures, a framework of cultural openness that was coined by psychologist Kurt Lewin. Yet, whether each of us belonged to one or another cultural group, intimacy was still a price to pay and remained a victim of transactional, consumerist oppression and shame.

What happens in cultures where people are encouraged to be more tactile and expressive or where they get to be in touch with extended families or raised by more caregivers? In our discussion, it became clear that even within so-called "peach" cultures (Spanish, Greek, Mexican and Brazilian in our group), intimacy in its various forms remains confined, shunned as unserious but also more tightly policed. This in turn led us to the familiar same dead end: intergenerational trauma, domestic abuse and mental illness stigma, all being perpetuated through starved collective intimacy or forced yet shame-controlled intimacy. To quote Rosa again, "'The personal is political" insists that the details of our lives can reveal structural power and oppression.' (p.5)

There are still many things to be commented on and commended about *Radical Intimacy*, but one thing is for sure: it is an essential read that fuels radical critical thinking around linking our personal resistance to the collective resistance. Without enraging the reader, it starts a quiet, irrefutable brainstorm that we cannot unsee: intimacy is amplified by meaning, and it suddenly exists in tandem with its personal and collective semantics. It becomes impossible to ignore how much it has been neglected and abused under our watch. As we learn in any therapeutic relationship, once we notice and name the problem, we might just start doing things differently. And that's a pretty good place to start.

UNITING OUR STRUGGLES: BODILY AUTONOMY, DISABILITY, AND FEMINISM

Cece Stranding

Access to prenatal screening has expanded significantly over the past few decades, allowing for more effective treatment of health conditions, and allowing prospective parents to make more informed decisions about their health and the health of their baby. Prenatal screenings test for, among other things, chromosomal conditions such as Down's syndrome, and as prenatal screening has become more commonplace, so too has the birth rate of babies with Down's syndrome fallen, owing to the termination of pregnancies where Down's syndrome is diagnosed during screening.¹

Socialists must unequivocally defend the equality of disabled people, and the right to access safe abortion as early as possible and as late as necessary, and we must avoid pitting these demands against each other. This is important, not just because of how anti-abortionists use disability rights to attack bodily autonomy today, but also because we have lessons to learn from how earlier feminists secured expansions to safe abortion access at the expense of disabled people, and the damage this has caused to both struggles.

We must instead recognise that failures of society, the market, and the state are to blame for attacks on both bodily autonomy and the equality of disabled people, and that the way forward is to unite these two struggles to improve society, not to allow our flawed society to make us choose one over the other.

DISABILITY RIGHTS VS BODILY AUTONOMY: A FALSE DICHOTOMY

Debate counterposing access to abortion and equality for disabled people has long existed, and has only become more prevalent as prenatal screening has become more freely available.



Disability rights campaigns have raised concerns around how prenatal screenings stigmatise people with Down's syndrome, and have at points gone as far as to oppose non-invasive prenatal testing, on the basis that increased prenatal diagnosis of Down's syndrome has allowed parents to terminate pregnancies, a practice that campaign groups such as Don't Screen Us Out have called eugenics.

Anti-abortionists more cynically evoke eugenics in an attempt to oppose abortion altogether, using disabled people as pawns to present restrictions on abortion as the solution to ending disability discrimination.

While disability should absolutely not be used to undermine access to abortion, and the personal decisions made by pregnant people about their own bodily autonomy should not be compared to eugenics, we should also recognise the genuine concerns of disability rights activists.

The information given to expectant parents often is informed by disablist perspectives, and lack of information, negativity, and even coercion from healthcare professionals do contribute to discrimination against disabled people. Perhaps most egregiously, many countries, including the UK, make explicit provisions that place different conditions on terminating pregnancies depending on

the diagnosis of disability.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST: A FAILURE OF SOLIDARITY

More uncomfortable to acknowledge is the fact that, before anti-abortionists invoked disability to attack bodily autonomy, feminists invoked disability to expand access to safe abortion. The Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA), who played a significant role in passing the Abortion Act (1967), which greatly expanded access to abortion in Britain and beyond, did not secure this hugely important gain on a purely feminist basis, but also utilised arguments of negative eugenics.²

When the ALRA was established in 1936, it fought for access to abortion by advocating for 'voluntary motherhood', a radical feminist position in a Britain which was firmly opposed to women's bodily autonomy. While the ALRA was not free from the ideology of eugenics, with several high-profile members of the ALRA being members of the Eugenics Society during this period, it was not until partway through the 1940s that the ALRA switched from campaigning on a basis of women's liberation to a focus on 'benefit to the population'. This direction was ossified in a postwar environment that was hostile to radical progressive ideas, plagued by intensifying racism, and confronting imperialist anxiety about the weakening of the empire, all of which contributed to the

ALRA trading in feminist arguments for arguments on the basis of eugenics.

The result of this was that when the Abortion Act was finally passed in 1967, it did not actually give women the right to abortion, but instead gave doctors control over who was given access to abortions, as well as enshrining differing term limits dependent on the diagnosis of disability. This not only impacted abortion access in Britain, but also exported these concessions to countries whose equivalent legislation was inspired by the Abortion Act. This is still felt nearly 60 years later, and laid the groundwork for anti-abortionists to use the same rhetoric to attack bodily autonomy today.

UNITING OUR STRUGGLES: A WAY FORWARD

The lesson for feminists today is that failing to build a united feminist movement will not just harm those who we fail to stand in solidarity with, but will ultimately cause long-lasting harm to us all. This is a lesson that is not just limited to our approach to bodily autonomy, or disability equality, but to all struggles within our movement.

On our approach to furthering the causes of access to abortion and equality for disabled people, we must push for both together. Equalise term limits by removing them for all, not imposing them for some; prevent the termination of pregnancies on the basis of disability not by restricting abortion, but instead by ending the undervaluation of the lives of disabled people and addressing the material conditions that influence individual decisions (such as inadequate welfare systems, and the extraction of time and wealth from working class people).

As always, we must not lose sight of the fact that our responsibility as socialists and feminists is to escape narratives that pit our rights against each other, and to instead unite against the capitalist system that undervalues, exploits, and limits us all.

1. <https://docs.downsyndromepopulation.org/factsheets/down-syndrome-population-europe-factsheet.pdf>

2. Klausen, Susanne Maria. "Thorny entanglements: feminism, eugenics and the Abortion Law Reform Association's (ALRA) campaign for safe, accessible abortion in Britain, 1936-1967." *Medical history* vol. 68,1 (2024): 86-108. doi:10.1017/mdh.2024.4

17TH CENTURY**Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695)**

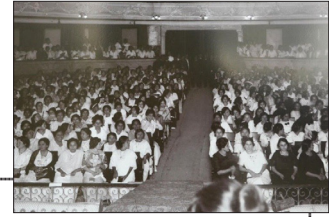
Nun, scholar, and poet. Her work presented arguments for women's education and denounced the double standards of men. She gave an account of the persecution she endured for her passion for learning, an activity which would bring men nothing but praise. She is considered, though anachronistically, the first feminist in America.

20TH CENTURY**Eulalia Guzmán (1890-1985)**

A philosopher, archaeologist, and anthropologist, she co-founded the club *Admiradoras de Juárez* (Fans of Juárez) with Hermila Galindo, Laura N. Torres, and Luz Vera. They discussed initiatives towards women's suffrage.

1916**Feminist Congresses in Yucatán**

Two major congresses took place in Yucatán. Women discussed topics such as education, suffrage, and social reforms.

**18TH - 19TH CENTURY****Women in the fight for independence:****Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (1768-1829)**

An insurgent who fought for independence from Spain. Due to her position in the upper class, she hosted parties at her house, which helped spread insurgent ideas.

Rita Pérez (1779-1861)

Alongside her husband, she joined the movement. She provided food and care to the rebels until she was taken prisoner.

Leona Vicario (1789-1842)

She is considered one of the first women journalists in Mexico. With her wealth, she helped finance the movement.

Manuela Medina (1780-1822)

She was an indigenous woman who was not only a soldier in the rebel army but an officer.

Other pioneering women:**Rita Cetina Gutiérrez (1846-1908)**

In 1871, she established the magazine and school for girls *La Siempreviva*, in Yucatán, Mexico.

Laureana Wright (1846-1896)

She founded the women's magazine *Las Hijas del Anahuac*. She was a theorist of women's education in Mexico.

Margarita Chorné y Salázar (1864-1862)

The first woman in Latin America to gain a university diploma (in dentistry).

1910**The Mexican Revolution**

During this time, women questioned the social injustices of the Porfirio Díaz regime (dictatorship). This movement reshaped women's roles. Women travelled with revolutionary armies and supported the movement.

**1917****The New Constitution**

The 1917 Constitution was the consequence of the revolutionary movement. It granted married women contractual rights and equal child custody, but women were not allowed to vote, only men.

During the 20th century, the central themes in Mexican feminist thought were education and women's participation in public life.

1600s-2025

Yetzi Cortés

1950s-60s

Expansion of political rights

1953 - Women obtained the right to vote.

1955 - Women voted for the first time in a federal election.

1963 - Political rights expanded for women: a constitutional reform allowed women to be elected to federal office.

1964 - First women enter the Mexican Senate: María Lavalle Urbina and Alicia Arellano Tapia became the first female senators in Mexico.

1968 - During the 1968 student movement, women played visible roles as organisers, speakers and activists, challenging traditional gender roles and laying important groundwork for the feminist movements that would emerge more explicitly in the 1970s.

1990s

Abortion and Femicide

1992 - The president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, resumed diplomatic relations with the Vatican, which made it more difficult to move forward with proposals to decriminalise abortion.

The feminist theorist Marcela Lagarde established the concept "feminicidio" (femicide), which relates to the murder of women enabled by silence, omission, negligence, or even complicity of state authorities.

2000s-10s

Legal progress

2001 - INMUJERES. Creation of the National Institute of Women, which institutionalised feminist demands within the Mexican state.

2007 - Abortion decriminalised in Mexico City* and the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence passes: This law recognises different forms of gender-based violence and obliges the state to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence against women.

2018-2022 - Ley Olimpia (Olimpia Law) recognises digital gender-based violence and provides a framework for prevention and response.

***Abortion was decriminalised in 2019 in the state of Oaxaca and in 2021 in the states of Hidalgo, Veracruz, Baja California and Colima.*

2024

First female President

Claudia Sheinbaum became Mexico's first female president.

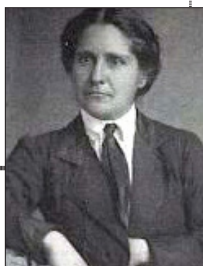


1919

Consejo Feminista Mexicano (Feminist Mexican Council)

Founded by women who participated in the Revolution. This group aimed to improve the work conditions for women.

Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza (pictured) was a co-founder of the council. She became the first president of the Council and was an advocate of miner's rights and education.



1970s-80s

Feminist movements

1970 - Lesbos, the first feminist lesbian group was founded by Yan María and Cristina Val.

1975 - "Against the practice of treating citizens as police spoils" was published. A manifesto that advocated the liberation of homosexuality as a way of social emancipation.

1976 - The Coalition of Mexican Feminist Women was established. Its main objective was to decriminalise abortion in Mexico. However, the party in power, the PRI, (Institutional Revolutionary Party), dismissed this effort. PRI promoted the idea of a stay-at-home woman who supports her husband and produces children.

1980s - Feminism started gaining ground in academia with the establishment of Women's Studies programs in universities.

Many women have fought and are still fighting for their human rights. One example of a collective movement is the women searching for more than 128,000 disappeared people, most of the time with their own resources and a lack of institutional support.

COERCION: LESSONS FROM THE USA

ANNIE LAWSON-FOLEY

A sentiment that is not uncommon to hear in discussions about abortion rights in the UK is 'At least it's not as bad as America'. In *Coercion: Surviving and Resisting Abortion Bans*, Kylie Cheung presents the stark reality of the state of reproductive rights in a post-Dobbs USA, charting the complex labyrinth of laws that criminalise and trap abortion seekers and providers, and explores the domestic and international ramifications of this. It is full of the sort of stories evoked in those 'it could be worse' conversations. These horror stories are not mere cautionary tales but the real lives (and deaths) of those oppressed by abortion bans oppress.

Cheung documents how this situation did not materialise overnight in June 2022, when the Supreme Court voted in 'Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization' to end the constitutional right to abortion. Rather it developed over a series of legal battles – and as liberal politics, assuming the fight was won, abandoned the cause of reproductive rights. Rather than serving as an 'it could be worse' comparator, *Coercion* shows those of us outside the USA why it is still vitally important to fight for full reproductive rights and the full decriminalisation of abortion.

It would not be possible to cover the entire breadth of *Coercion* in this review, so I focus on Cheung's most salient points and those that feminists and activists for reproductive justice in the UK can immediately learn the most from.

ABORTION BANS AS STATE VIOLENCE

Cheung uses, and I will use, the term 'women and pregnant capable people' when describing the impact of abortion bans. 'Pregnant capable people' covers anyone who can become pregnant, including queer and trans people and children.

Cheung proposes that abortion bans are a form of state violence against women and pregnant capable people, and that this is their intended function, not an unfortunate side effect. Throughout *Coercion*, she demonstrates how abortion bans harm women and pregnant capable people, as individuals and on a societal level. This does not stop at the initial denial of choice over what happens to one's own body. Abortion bans trap people in abusive relations, ensnare them in long and expensive legal battles, imprison them for crimes against fetuses, and drain their finances as they travel great distances to receive reproductive healthcare. Those who fight abortion bans have their organisations shut down, funding withdrawn, premises encroached on, and volunteers and activists attacked. Pregnant people are not the only victims. All potential fertility is policed by abortion bans, and anyone who could, or looks like they could, become pregnant is affected.

THE END OF ROE

Like how the UK's Abortion Act permits abortion in certain circumstances by suspending the Offences Against the Person Act, 'Roe v. Wade' did not repeal



abortion laws, but created a right to abortion before the point of fetal viability. As such, Cheung highlights, it left room for the imposition of term limits and the creation of laws to block access to abortion. Indeed, Dobbs did not appear out of the blue. In her introduction, Cheung cites 'McKenna v. Miller', a 2013 custody battle over a fetus in which the father – who had expressed not wanting anything to do with the pregnancy – was given custody rights as the mother moved state whilst pregnant. This move was considered 'irresponsible' and 'reprehensible' by the court. The decision was eventually reversed by an appeals court, but it is a chilling precursor to the current legal minefield created by abortion bans.

Another pre-Dobbs law that appears frequently in *Coercion* is Texas' S.B.8. Introduced in 2021, it allows state residents to sue anyone who helps an individual access abortion care outside of Texas for up to \$10,000, allowing abusers and rapists to harass victims and their support networks, and profit off their pregnancies. After 'Dobbs', in 2024,



a Texas anti-abortion agency launched a campaign to recruit men who were interested in suing their ex-partners under this law.

The overturning of 'Roe' by 'Dobbs' 'altered if not altogether tore the fabric of society for women and pregnant capable people,' but its restoration should not be the end goal, Cheung tells us. It was never strong enough to prevent these laws from being passed and ensure reproductive justice; the rights to have children, not have children, and to raise children in safe environments, free from violence.

THE POST-DOBBS LANDSCAPE

Thirteen American states have full abortion bans and according to the Center for Reproductive Rights, another twelve are hostile to abortion and likely to introduce bans. Around forty states have fetal homicide laws, intended to protect pregnant people, but now used against them to criminalise abortions and pregnancy loss. Throughout *Coercion*, Cheung details how these laws enable violence against women and pregnant

capable people. In first the two years after 'Dobbs', research estimates that 65,000 rape-induced pregnancies occurred in the United States. The first public abortion case after 'Dobbs' saw a teenager sentenced to jail for ending her pregnancy to leave an abusive partner.

The dangers do not end at forced pregnancies. TRAP laws – Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers – which exist in twenty-five states, are linked to increased domestic violence and homicide. Much of *Coercion* is spent analysing the close relationship between abortion bans and domestic abuse. Cheung speaks to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, who report increased incidences of reproductive coercion since 'Dobbs'. Access to abortion can be key to escaping an abusive relationship, and as such abortion bans punish victims for protecting themselves. In 2024 the Hotline reported that, in a survey of 3,400 respondents, five per cent said their partners threatened to report them to law enforcement if they had an abortion, and five per cent threatened to sue them if they had an abortion. Horrifyingly,

the leading cause of death for pregnant people in the US is homicide, most often by intimate partners.

Coercion demonstrates clearly that access to abortion can be a matter of life or death. These preventable deaths come in many forms – by murder, pregnancy complications, or doctors delaying life-saving abortions. When access to abortion is limited, maternal mortality increases, often dramatically; between 2019 and 2022, maternal deaths in Texas rose by 59%. To cover this up, some states have stopped recording or analysing maternal mortality data.

Cheung highlights that barriers to abortion, and the ensuing impacts, are compounded by other forms of oppression. People of colour, undocumented immigrants, poor people, those with disabilities, queer and trans people and victims of domestic violence are at the sharp end of the state violence enacted by abortion bans. Chapter 6, which covers pregnancy in the carceral system explores sexual violence, reproductive oppression and coercion

in prisons, where people of colour are overrepresented, and ICE facilities.

LEGAL CONFUSION

Abortion bans generate, and rely on, confusion about the law and a fear of criminalisation. Where exceptions in abortion bans exist, this is often not clear to those seeking them, or even their doctors. There is also the fear of being reported by doctors and medical staff, especially by those who have managed their own abortion. Cheung shows us that this fear is far from irrational; the most charges in a year for pregnancy loss, including by abortion, occurred from June 2022 to June 2023, after the introduction of 'Dobbs'.

Navigating these laws is extremely stress inducing, and (in some cases prohibitively) expensive. In fact, in America's privatised healthcare system, so is being the victim of sexual assault – the average cost of a sexual assault survivor's emergency room visit is \$4000. Again, this has a greater impact on those who are already marginalised, who are often less likely to have medical insurance, and the time and money required to travel for an abortion.

Cheung reminds us that the work of abortion bans stretches far beyond criminalising the ending of a pregnancy: their aim is total control of our bodies. In Alabama, which has a track record for incarcerating pregnant people, miscarriage caused by alleged substance abuse can result in a 99-year prison sentence. 'Dobbs' has facilitated access to emergency contraception, which parts of the right conflate with abortion. Access to other healthcare and medicine which potentially impact fertility is impaired too. Cheung relates the story of a 14-year-old who was denied medication for her arthritis and osteoporosis because the drug, methotrexate, can induce miscarriage. *Coercion* spells out that through abortion bans, the right seeks to control all potential fertility, and the bodies of all women and pregnant capable people.

RAPE EXCEPTIONS ARE A FALLACY

Anyone who reads *Coercion* can never again think that rape exceptions to abortion bans work. Cheung highlights that they serve to legitimise bans, and imply that there are good, worthy

abortions, and bad, frivolous ones. Rape exceptions are often inaccessible, and to work, rely on rape being easy to prove, and for this to be done in a timely manner, in a medical and legal system that is hostile to survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Thus, rape exceptions fuel the misconception that rape is easy to prove to the police and other authorities. In reality, an organiser from North Dakota's Prairie Abortion Fund tells Cheung, they are 'just another round of violation of [survivors'] autonomy within the health care system, within a police and judicial system that routinely hurts survivors.'

Rape exceptions are disingenuous and do not work. We should be wary of criticising restrictive abortion laws for their lack of rape exceptions, Cheung argues, when laws with rape exceptions 'carry all the same implicit violence.'

HEALTHCARE WORKERS AND ABORTION BANS

Coercion contains interviews with and stories from many organisations facilitating and funding access to abortions, domestic violence organisations and advocacy groups doing extremely important work in an increasingly hostile environment. What is largely missing from the picture is the voice of healthcare workers, although this is perhaps not surprising in a country with a privatised healthcare system.

Rather, Cheung describes how abortion bans sanction medical abuse. There are stories of doctors denying abortions due to fear of prosecution under anti-abortion laws, in some cases leading to a patient's death. Several abortion ban states have threatened doctors with imprisonment; for example, abortion providers in Louisiana can face 15 years in prison and \$200,000 in fines. Yet, in the face of the unimaginable pain and preventable deaths of patients like Josseli Barnica, who died of sepsis because doctors waited 40 hours for the foetus's heartbeat to stop to complete her miscarriage, it is hard not to regard the actions of the doctors involved as cowardly.

In some states with abortion bans, including Louisiana, Cheung reports that there has been an increase in C-sections as an alternative to emergency abortions for dangerous pregnancies. Cheung argues that this circumvents legal risk, but is done at the expense of patient safety; Physicians for Human Rights report that this will lead to unnecessary complications.



Elsewhere, abortion bans have effectively caused brain drains, with medical professionals leaving to states where they won't be prosecuted for their work. As a result of such an exodus, in 2023 a rural Idaho hospital had to shut its labour and delivery department. Abortion bans rearrange medical infrastructure, which has a greater impact on communities already marginalised by the healthcare system.

What *Coercion* does not say, but what is clear from this to me, is that so long as reproductive healthcare is controlled by the state and medical system, healthcare workers must be organised, and supported by their unions, and by the left, to fight these abortion bans. It carries a great risk, but this means protecting and prioritising patient safety and disobeying abortion bans. Given the dire state of American healthcare, *Coercion* also leaves you thinking about the need for radical community care in the absence of official medicine.

DECRIMINALISE ABORTION

Cheung's conclusion is firm: only the total repeal of abortion laws; ending state intervention and policing of pregnancies, will allow the conditions for reproductive justice to be achieved. No 'rights-based' framework, or half-way



suspension of laws that ban abortion, or laws restricted with term limits, will do this. Crucially, these laws and exceptions can be overturned, as 'Roe' was, and are under attack from a steady drip of anti-abortion campaigning in the UK. In the meantime, Cheung reminds us, surviving abortion bans depends on our willingness, the willingness of friends, families, communities, comrades and strangers, to resist abortion bans: to pool resources, offer help, refuse to spy on and report each other.

Workers' Liberty calls for access to abortion as early as possible and as late as necessary. We are for the removal of

all barriers – including criminalisation, mandatory waiting times, the requirement of institutional approval, financial charges, insufficient provision, and term limits – and for the decriminalisation of abortion, which would lead to it being regulated in the same way as other healthcare procedures. Our support for abortion rights is based on bodily autonomy. Nobody should be forced to stay pregnant against their wishes.



UNISON: ANDREA EGAN ELECTION WIN - THE FIGHT STARTS NOW

Joan Trevor

In the last issue of *Women's Fightback* (issue 35) we covered the election for General Secretary in the UK's biggest union, UNISON. We're pleased to report that the left-wing challenger Andrea Egan beat the right-wing incumbent Christina McAnea.

From being leader of a union of 1.3m public sector workers, among them some of the lowest-paid workers in the country, Christina is likely next to be seen publicly in the House of Lords although she has already secured a cushy post as a trustee of the National Portrait Gallery. How does that work? It's Keir Starmer's reward to her for services rendered over decades to the right wing of the Labour Party.

The election turnout was woefully low at

7%, but Andrea did win convincingly by 60% to Christina's 40%. Basically, a large part of Christina's vote, such as it was, stayed at home.

Andrea is the first laymember to be elected leader of this union and will have a lot on her plate over the next five years of her term of office. She will be opposed in the first place by the majority right-wing National Executive Committee, and by many of the entrenched right-wingers among the staff. She will need to be both supported and held to account by members and by her left-wing supporters who are predominantly organised through Time For Real Change (TFRC). TFRC are currently busy campaigning for the imminent Service Group Elections, but they also need to think about building the campaigning base of the union. Because it's only through this that they will be able to



transform Andrea's good ideas and commitments into gains for members – defence of jobs, better pay – and improvements in public services. TFRC also needs to come up with mechanisms to hold all our postholders to account and debate our differences.

Andrea has pledged to take only the equivalent of her current social worker's salary and return the rest of the fat GS salary to the union. In her first days in office, she has come out publicly arguing against the right of the Labour Party, visiting picket lines, and addressing UNISON's Higher Education conference in favour of free education and reform of higher education finances. McAnea didn't come near higher education in 10 years.

'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.

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www.workersliberty.org/wf

Workers' Liberty hosts monthly socialist feminist book clubs in London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Leicester and online. All welcome!

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