

# WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK



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*One of our placards at the anti-Bolsonaro protest in London last October.*

*Photo: Gemma Short*

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**50p**

# Women Fighting Stalinism ■ Jill Mountford

How does a woman who adamantly refused to call herself a feminist and was vehemently 'anti-communist', who was a passionate Roman Catholic and held Pope John Paul II as one her heroes, and later friend, herself become an inspirational hero for socialist feminists?

For starters, she does so by being astonishingly courageous; by challenging the crushing Stalinist, anti-working class bureaucracy in her workplace over two long decades; by organising an underground workers group, and, in doing so, becoming the subject of constant harassment and risking imprisonment.

Anna Walentynowicz was the crane operator in the Lenin Shipyard, in Gdansk whose sacking on August 7, 1980 famously sparked a strike for her reinstatement one week later on August 14. By August 16 management had caved into the workers demands and Lech Walesa and other men on the strike committee declared a return to work. And, according to most eyewitness accounts, it was Anna Walentynowicz along with Alina Pienkowska (a 30 year old nurse and trade unionist at the shipyard) and Henryka Krzywonos (a transport workers' shop steward who famously used her tram to bring the city to a total standstill), who argued with Walesa to keep the strike going. It was Henryka Krzywonos who shouted from the floor of the mass meeting "If you abandon us, we'll be lost. Buses can't face tanks". The strike continued and spread and took on the demands of other strikes on the Baltic coast.

By 21 August Walentynowicz and Walesa were co-leading the new Solidarnosc movement that within weeks was a movement with a million members and by the first anniversary (August 1981) had ten million workers in its ranks. In just over three week of the strike starting the newly formed Solidarnosc forced the Stalinist authorities to sign an agreement, a 21 point workers charter that included the following demands: free and independent trade unions, the right to strike, the freeing of political prisoners and for a free, uncensored media.

Solidarnosc was one of the first free trade unions in the Eastern Bloc and was the beginning of the end for the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe.

Anna Walentynowicz was just five months off retirement in August 1980 having worked in the Lenin Shipyard for thirty years. Once recognised as a 'Hero of Socialist Labour', or a Stakhanovite, for her hard work and productivity she increasingly became disillusioned with so-called 'communist' rule in Poland and was a vocal champion for justice for workers in the shipyard. And so instead of retiring at the end of 1980 she became a central figure in one of the most significant working class events of the twentieth century.

Anna Walentynowicz's work as a trade unionist deserves consideration, a leading woman with two decades of experience she was part of a movement that within the first few weeks of its existence had a membership that was more or less fifty/fifty women and men while women made up 30% of the manual workers in the Lenin shipyard. And though massively underrepresented in the leadership of Solidarnosc these women played a vital role in building this movement.

And they did so despite carrying the double burden of hard wage-slavery for very poor pay and conditions while being valorised as mothers and homemakers. When women were not working they were queuing, in long, long queues for basic food items often at highly inflated prices. Indeed these highly inflated prices were the catalyst to a wave of strikes and oppressive reaction in Lodz in 1971. These class battles galvanised many workers including Anna Walentynowicz and she others worked in underground workers groups until the founding of Solidarnosc in August 1980.

Gender inequality in Poland was and is influenced and bolstered by the Catholic Church; by traditional nationalist values about women, motherhood and Matka Polka; and by Stalinism and the glorification of the family and a mother's role within it. Despite the role played by women such as Anna, Alina and Henryka; and despite the solid support and involvement of millions of women in Solidarnosc there was much sexism within the movement. The top leadership of Solidarnosc included a president, two deputies, a presidium of 10 and a council of 100 and there was not one woman to be seen.

Yet Polish women were among the first to get the vote in 1918, they had restricted legal abortions rights from 1932, and full abortion rights from 1956 (indeed women from Sweden and Germany travelled to Poland to make use of this opportunity). And Poland is the only post-Stalinist country that has developed anything like a women's movement. But this movement developed as a direct response to anti-women policies around abortion in 1990 when the post-Stalinist government attacked abortion rights and now Poland has some of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. That same year Solidarnosc established a women's section in less than a year it was closed. As the complexion of Solidarnosc changed over that decade a new kind of feminism developed. As Nancy Fraser points out, it was during this period Poland saw a wave of feminism that not only failed to criticise neo-liberal capitalism, but moved from a feminism based on more egalitarian ideas to more individualistic meritocratic and entrepreneurial feminism. Encouraging women to 'lean in'.

Just two days after martial law was declared, after the tanks had rolled on to the streets and class fighters were shot or arrested, Helena Luczywo, a journalist in the Solidarnosc movement, cautiously but courageously left her apartment in search of others to set up a much needed free and independent underground press. What she and others did over the over the next 9 years was in many ways astonishingly impressive. But today Helena Luczywo is one of Poland's wealthiest and most powerful people. Over that decade the politics of the Lenin shipyard lost out to a much more bourgeois liberation movement against decades of Stalinist oppression. As we said at the time, Stalinism was never socialism. But the revolt against it is socialism in the embryo. And having the freedom to organise, to think freely and independently, to make and fight for our independent class interests is the beginning of human emancipation.



Anna Walentynowicz with Lech Walesa



Henryka Krzywonos (right) with Walentynowicz



Alina Pienkowska

## Edith Lanchester and 'free love' ■ Micheál MacEoin

Edith Lanchester (1871-1966) was a British socialist and feminist, who came to prominence in the late nineteenth century for making a challenge to the institution of marriage.

Lanchester came from a prosperous family in Battersea, in south London, but committed herself to the socialist movement. She joined the SDF in 1892, rising to a position on its executive in 1895.

Her socialist feminist convictions had led Lanchester to conclude that the wife's vow to obey her husband was oppressive and that she was politically opposed to the institution of marriage. Acting on her convictions, Lanchester caused a storm when she announced that, in protest against Britain's patriarchal marriage laws, she was going to cohabit in a 'free union' with her lover, an Irish factory worker and fellow socialist, James Sullivan.

The union was to begin on 26 October 1895. Incensed, Lanchester's father and brothers barged into her house the night before, and forcibly subjected their daughter to an examination by Dr George Fielding-Blandford, a leading psychiatrist and author of *Insanity and Its Treatment*. After signing emergency commitment papers under the 1890 Lunacy Act, Fielding-Blandford had Lanchester imprisoned; her own father and brothers bound her wrists and dragged her to a carriage destined for the Priory Hospital in Roehampton.

The psychiatrist explained his reasoning in a contemporary news report. Lanchester "had always been eccentric, and had lately taken up with Socialists of the most advanced order. She seemed quite unable to see that the step she was about to take meant utter ruin", was in his opinion "a monomaniac on the subject of marriage" and the psychiatrist believed that "her brain had been turned by Socialist meetings and writings, and that she was quite unfit to take care of herself."

The incident caused a national scandal and attracted much interest, with the *New York Times* reporting that "no penny paper had printed less than ten columns on this engrossing subject during the week." Almost immediately a meeting was called by Lanchester's comrades under the auspices of the Legitimation League, a body set up to campaign to secure equal rights for children born outside of marriage. At the meeting, a resolution was passed against Fielding-Blandford, and Lanchester's landlady, the SDF activist Mary Gray, was urged to take legal action against her tenant's brother for assaulting her during the raid on her home.

SDF members also sang the Red Flag outside Lanchester's window at the asylum to keep up her morale. After four days of lobbying by the SDF, with the help of Lanchester's local MP, the former SDF member John Burns, the Commissioners of Lunacy proclaimed her sane though "foolish" and released her.

Contemporary socialists were often squeamish about defending Lanchester, with Independent Labour Party leader Keir Hardie accusing her of discrediting socialism by associating it with 'free love'. When Lanchester spoke at a meeting in the Opretha House in Edinburgh in February 1896, a young James Connolly from the chair assured the audience of the packed room that "socialism had no connection with speculations on family life and was nowise responsible for the opinions of individual socialists on that subject." Eleanor Marx, angry at some socialists' failure to support Lanchester, took her on as a secretary in 1897, and the two became friends.

Lanchester's stand was a brave and radical challenge by a committed socialist feminist to the institution of marriage and to late Victorian society's highly constrained and patriarchal conception of femininity.



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2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the defeat of Stalinism in Eastern Europe at the hands of workers and students. Stalin was a murderous dictator who systematically stripped power away from the working-class in the years after the Russian Revolution. Workers' Liberty are holding several events to discuss the historical record, the anti-Stalinist revolutions of 1989-90 and the defeats and regressions since 1990.

For some of our articles on Stalinism see [www.workersliberty.org/marxism-and-stalinism](http://www.workersliberty.org/marxism-and-stalinism)

# Introducing: Social Reproduction Theory ■ Kieran Miles

One of the key texts of early social reproduction theory was Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, published in 1983. Vogel's aim in the book was to criticise the 'dual systems theory' that emerged from the 1970s, which saw (a) Marxism as an explanation for class exploitation, and (b) patriarchy as an explanation for women's oppression: two linked but fundamentally separate systems. Some, like Hartmann, explicitly stated that Marxism was 'sex-blind', which necessitated a 'specifically feminist analysis': of patriarchy. Some socialist-feminists went further and suggested how the two systems might be more than linked, but symbiotically related. But Vogel sought to overcome the 'dual systems theory' entirely, and explain how class exploitation and women's oppression are in fact component parts of the same system (see *Capitalism and Women's Oppression* by Rachael Clark). As Susan Ferguson and David McNally note in their introduction to Vogel's book, the subtitle is 'Towards a Unitary Theory', and "that subtitle links Vogel's project to the socialist-feminist search for a single, integrated theoretical account of both women's oppression and the capitalist mode of production" (xxiii).

Women's oppression under capitalism is rooted in women's overwhelming responsibility within the family unit for (a) domestic labour, necessary for the functioning of capitalism on a day-to-day level, by ensuring the workforce is capable of showing up the next day, fit for work, and (b) child-rearing, necessary for capitalism's generational continuation, via reproduction of the future workforce. Bhattacharya states in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* that "both those functions are disproportionately borne by women under capitalism and are the sources of women's oppression under that system" (73). Labour is the critical element in the creation of surplus-value (production), so we must also analyse how that labour is made ready for the next working day, year or decade (reproduction). "Every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction" (Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 711). Put simply: if capitalism continues because we need to work in order to live, what are the conditions that enable us to work? This is the starting point of social reproduction theory.

*"If the owner of labour-power works to-day, to-morrow he must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength. His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a labouring individual. His natural wants, such as food, clothing, fuel, and housing, vary according to the climatic and other physical conditions of his country. On the other hand, the number and extent of his so-called necessary wants, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilisation of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed"*5 (Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 275).

This tells us two things. Firstly, the importance of class struggle in determining the value of labour-power, and the kinds of needs, wants and desires we have. Secondly, that labour-power is expended through the production of commodities. After a hard day's work, you need a cup of tea and a hot meal! "A definite quantity of human muscle, nerve, brain... is expended, and these things have to be replaced" (Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 274-5) – the question is *how* are they replaced?

The most common site for the replenishment of labour-power is the kin-based family unit. Despite the mass entry of women into the workforce over the last century, women are expected to take on the majority or even the sole responsibility for domestic

labour outside of work hours too: what feminists have termed the 'double burden'. Women who work, care for older family members, and childrearing in the home. These tasks are of course unpaid, and so the structure of the nuclear family, with women dependent on a partner's wage, continues for millions of people even today. The think tank Catalyst stated that in 2018, women's participation in work globally was 48.5%, compared to 75% of men. The gap between the two is largely explained by the expectation that women will participate in domestic labour in place of paid employment. Of course, women who work are usually expected to continue domestic labour outside of work hours too: what feminists have termed the 'double burden'. Women who work are additionally more likely to be in part time employment – a 2013 report by the Office for National Statistics found that of women in work globally, 42% are in part time employment. This can be explained by the responsibilities of domestic labour, and the shortage of free childcare. On top of this, women can be expected to be paid less than men for like-for-like work – Catalyst found in 2018, the average gender pay gap in the UK is 18.4%, so women earn about 80% of men's wages for identical work. The gap is much wider in other countries.

Marx was careful to note that even in developed countries where industrialised capitalism had become the dominant mode of production, there were often still remnants of earlier stages of capitalism (e.g. handicrafts) or even other forms of production. Similarly, it is important to note that whilst the family household is the dominant site of social reproduction, there are several alternative sites as well.

Within the national framework, a source of generational replenishment of the workforce can come through immigration. Governments with ageing populations often seek young migrant workers to take on social care and health work, or other forms of work more generally. Earlier in capitalism's history, slavery provided an expanded workforce in the cotton and tobacco plantations in the USA, or the sugar and coffee plantations in the Caribbean.

Some reproduction can also take place outside the house, for example, in the 'dormitory labour system' for temporary migrants and contract labourers (overwhelmingly women, bound by the hukou system) in the Special Economic Zones in southern China (see Pun Ngai 2009), in which the state builds dormitories next to factory compounds and rents them out for use to the factory owners. Shortening the spatial distance between the workplace and the site of reproduction has clear benefits for the bosses: it is easy to hold down wages, and lengthen the working day. Twentieth century Fascism and Stalinism point to yet another system: the inhumane history of forced labour camps. There are many other additional non-family based forms of living today: flatshares, housing co-operatives, care homes, single-parent households, and so on. However, with all these specificities having been accounted for, the household of the nuclear family remains the dominant form in which social reproduction takes place.

Bhattacharya stresses that successful battles by the working class for healthcare provision, pensions, public facilities like children's centres, has led to some aspects of social reproduction moving directly into the sphere of paid employment. Instead of caring for an elderly relative, we pay a care home; instead of cooking, we get a takeaway; instead of caring for children round the clock, we make use of children's centres. The level of class struggle (and a degree of ruling class self-interest) has often determined whether these things are paid for by individuals and families, or funded out of taxation by the state. Cultural expectations that many of the tasks formerly done by women in the household remain 'women's work', even

when turned into paid employment, often means that these jobs are in the majority held by women – and are often the lowest paid industries too.

Many of these sites blur the lines between the private and public spheres – a school is a site of reproduction (the education of children) and production (teachers working for a wage.) We can also make distinctions between whether these sites are run for profit or not, and therefore whether the work is productive or non-productive (in the sense of the terms as used in Marxist economics), but the outcome is the same. Bhattacharya notes that "it is important in this regard to clarify that what we designated above as two separate spaces – (a) spaces of production of value (point of production) and (b) spaces for reproduction of labor-power – may be separate in a strictly spatial sense, but they are actually united in the theoretical and operational senses... [and] sometimes the two processes may be ongoing within the same space" (75).

Having outlined the main contours of social reproduction theory, there are three current areas of debate amongst its proponents that I would like to draw attention to – none of which I have drawn a definitive answer to, and all of which I have sketched simplified outlines of below. The first is the question of the classification of social reproduction, specifically as to whether it is value-producing or not. The second is how to overcome the problems of social reproduction, focused on campaigns like Wages for Housework. The third is the emotional aspect to these questions.

The first question can be posed thus: is the reproductive sphere (all of the cooking, cleaning, and other housework, and even the emotional support of a relationship, the schools that taught us, the hospitals that treat us, and the libraries and parks and culture that nourish our intellectual faculties) necessary for the continuation of capitalism, but one which falls outside of the sphere of production – or is it a form of production itself? Is social reproduction, as the creator of the commodity of labour-power, also a form of productive labour?

Autonomist Marxists who answer positively to this question have developed a theory of the 'social factory'. If labour-power is a commodity, but produced outside of the workplace, and the extension of capitalist social relations reaches far beyond the factory gates, then "the whole of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination to the whole of society" (Tronti). This however, poses immediate problems for socialist strategy: if the workplace is no longer a specific spatial site, but the whole of society, how do struggles over wages and working conditions materialise? Additionally, Marx wrote about how capitalist social relations expand beyond the workplace and necessarily imply, for example, the existence of the state, and a legal-judicial framework (see chapter 2 of *Capital Vol. 1*). This does not however, overcome the necessity of waged labour, in the workplace, for the functioning of capitalism, and blurs the crucial distinctions made by social reproduction theorists between waged and unwaged labour, private and public spheres, production and reproduction.

The second question relates to attempts to overcome the oppression of domestic labour. The Wages for Housework campaign in the 1970s sought to draw attention to the existence of gendered domestic labour, and to demand wages for that domestic work, necessary for capitalism, that went unpaid. However, the logic of the demand remained in some ways individualistic, centred around that work remaining within the household. Federici stated that the demand for wages for housework was not really made with the expectation of winning the demand – "in fact, to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it" – it was

## Transphobia and Materialism ■ Natalia Cassidy

*This article is written in the hope of generating some discussion around this topic, the author would strongly encourage response pieces, whether in agreement or disagreement*

Discussion around trans rights, particularly in the last few years, has largely fallen into two strands: the liberal identitarian view, and the essentialist, determinist view held by some of those who call themselves radical feminists. I hope to offer an alternative view grounded in materialism, situating transphobia within gendered oppression and broader, queer oppressions.

The material basis of gendered oppression is, in brief, the gendered division of labour. This has its historical basis in biological sex-differences & women's ability to birth children, though it is not bound solely to this. Women cannot individually escape gendered oppression if for whatever reason they are not able to have children. This condition led to women primarily performing reproductive labour. In pre-capitalist society, the family had greater independence in economic terms. Much economic activity, particularly agrarian production, was organised on small family holdings. As capitalism developed the family moved from being a relatively independent unit, to an economically dependent (as

wage labourers), but internally interdependent unit. This exacerbated and formalised the gendered divide between productive and reproductive labour

It is at this point historically D'Emilio asserts homosexuality came into being - an assertion, for what it's worth, I don't think he literally believed but rather used for its analytical and political value. D'Emilio argues that because of this move away from the family unit away from independent units to interdependent units, several things occurred. Due to the increased, limited, individual economic freedom that capitalism introduced, people were able to effectively live outside of any family unit, it was no longer an economic necessity to do so. Therefore, gays and lesbians (though mostly gay men given the dominance of men in the wage-labour force) were able to live their lives fully expressing their homosexuality where before they were unable to.

As capitalism developed it showed an increased tendency away from the central economic role of the family. Women were entering the workplace in increasing numbers, the working day was becoming shorter and improvements in technology meant there was less need for a dedicated class devoted solely to reproductive labour in the same way as before. As this central economic role of family life waned, the social aspect was emphasised. Family was seen as central to

personal fulfilment, happiness and social stability. So we see as the forces of capitalist development weakened the bonds of the family unit, the blame was placed on homosexuals as a convenient scapegoat for perceived fraying of social fabric to do with the de-prioritisation of family life. Recent history I think has supported D'Emilio's analysis; the habilitation of homosexuality in most advanced capitalist economies has been largely dominated by liberal assertions that gays and lesbians are just as able to participate in family life and the institution as marriage as anyone else.

I think the analysis of grounding transphobia in materialism lies parallel to the argument made by D'Emilio. As capitalism is developing, the ruling class has less and less interest in maintaining rigid gender divides as it did in the past. It is in the interests of capital that women's surplus labour be appropriated in line with men's and that they have cause to consume the output of production as men do.

So as such rigid ties to maintaining strictly enforced gender roles wanes due to the requirements of capital shifting, trans people act as a convenient scapegoat for those that see this freeing up of gendered expression as an affront to the health of our social fabric

Source: John D'Emilio, (1983) 'Capitalism and gay identity', in Powers of Desire: the politics of sexuality

## Become Not Women ■ Janine Booth

*In 1848, in response to the 300-strong Convention for Woman's Rights in Seneca Falls (USA) and its Declaration of Sentiments, a Philadelphia newspaper urged the city's ladies not to join the new movement and become women but to stay as "wives, belles, virgins and mothers". Here's Janine Booth's poetic response:*

We strongly urge our female readers  
In wimples, bonnets, veils and mufflers  
You're made as bearers, growers, feeders  
Not drivers, tellers, surgeons, discoverers  
Girls, stay at home and sew your days  
No trade nor college as your brothers  
Serve, adorn, keep pure and raise  
Wives, belles, virgins and mothers

Philly wants its fillies chained  
For breeding mares not running wild  
So say 'I will' and entertain  
And keep thee chaste then raise the child  
Stir the cookpot, wash and pray  
That if he dies your living's covered  
Turn not into women, stay  
Our wives, belles, virgins and mothers

Convert ye not from these to women  
With views, demands, loud voices, rights  
We fear the cold of homes fires dimming  
Sign not this Sentiment to fight  
Become not women, darling things  
Keep private hells that surge and smother  
With bands and rings and apron strings  
For wives, belles, virgins and mothers

'Convention' means our fine traditions  
Not halls of speeches, fancy schemes  
Of harridans who rouse sedition  
For 'rights' and other silly dreams  
No spinsters', harpies', whores' agenda  
A man's firm hand must grip the rudder  
Be passive, pretty, untarnished, tender  
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# Women and the Alt-Right ■ Cathy Nugent

The image (and to large extent the reality) of US alt-right/far right activist groups is that they are overwhelmingly populated by men. Indeed, these groups draw on certain themes associated with “toxic masculinity”; for example, extremely conservative views on gender and gender-defined social roles. The anti-feminist Men’s Rights Movement has been a “gateway movement” for the alt-right.

It may come as a surprise that, according to the 2016 American National Election Survey (ANES), men are not any more likely to have those core social feelings that underlie the current US far right than women. In other words there is a disparity between the right’s base (mixed gender) and its activism (male-dominated). Moreover, when you look at the biographies of women who are prominent on the far right, they do not embody a stereotype of women who stay at home to breed babies.

Recognising the fact of women’s involvement on the far right is not to claim a feminist success story. Rather is to point to a serious danger. If the far right does begin to reflect its gender diverse base it will grow more rapidly. The feminist left, feminist women in particular, should not view the far right as an immutably male-centred phenomena.

George Hawley (Institute of Family Studies, <https://ifstudies.org>) analysed the 2016 American National Election Study which asked respondents for their views on three statements associated with white identity politics – on white identity, the importance of white solidarity and white victimisation. Hawley looked at the results for non-Hispanic white people. Just under 6% strongly identified with all three white identity statements.

The disaggregated statistics show some unsurprising demographic correlations. For example white identities were slightly stronger among people who had less education: 7% of people with no college degree, as opposed to 3% with a college degree strongly identified with all three white identity statements. One strong correlation was quite interesting – 10% of divorced people had a strong white identity. Of the results which were more surprising, such as no great difference in views between religious and non-religious people, there was also no great difference between men (5.24%) and women (5.99%).

At some level far right groups and self-proclaimed leaders need to recognise women – although that recognition can be, has to be, very warped. Take the far right group Proud Boys. Founded by ex-Vice Media boss Gavin McInnes, Proud Boys is closely associated with anti-feminism, is known for starting fights at political rallies and, of course, is open only to people born with a penis. Yet they felt the need to set up an auxiliary group, Proud Girls or Proud Boys’ Girls. Note, the possessive syntax, which points to an abusive culture which some women got involved in.

In July last year a Portland police officer, Erin Willey was sacked after a photo of her dressed in a Proud Girls t-shirt appeared in a local newspaper. Later it was revealed that the photo was sent to the press by her abusive ex-boyfriend. Willey claimed that she thought that Proud Boys was just a pro-Trump drinking club. Willey was not reinstated, a fact which her ex-boyfriend celebrated online. Nonetheless the story helped to get Proud Boy’s officially designated an extremist organisation by the FBI.

The “careers” of three prominent far-right women, Faith Goldy, Lauren Southern and Lana Lokteff, show up a number of contradictions.

Both Faith Goldy and Lauren Southern are Canadians who were reporters for Canada’s conservative Sun News Network; both ended up at YouTube-based Rebel Media. Rebel Media is a counter-jihadist outfit.

Goldy claims that she only became active on the far right in the run up to the August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, when she discovered the “intellectual rigour” of the far right. They introduced her to the idea of the “white genocide”, the idea that white people are being replaced in “their own land” which helped her make sense of her own hitherto nebulous observations blah, blah. Whether this self-serving racist nonsense was too much, even for Rebel Media, we don’t know; they sacked her.

Lauren Southern, also Canadian, but unlike the highly certificated Goldy, is a college drop-out. She started out in the ultra-conservative Canadian Libertarian Party and is now, like of a lot of far-right personalities, a YouTube star who goes on speaking tours, yet, paradoxically feels obliged to say such things as, “women are ‘not psychologically developed to hold leadership positions’.

Her most recent hate-targets have been transgender people and activism, saving migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean, and, of course, Islam (her book, is entitled *Barbarians: How Baby Boomers, Immigrants, and Islam Screwed My Generation*).

Lana Lokteff got her start in her husband’s media company Red Ice which specialised in conspiracy theories, and later antisemitism. Lokteff seems a bit canner than other women right activists. She’s made it her business to try to recruit women to the movement because they are an important base. As she told one rally “It was women who got Trump elected. And I guess, to be really edgy, it was women who got Hitler elected.” (Edgy certainly, if not accurate on that point about Hitler.)

It is certainly not new or news that women have participated in far right movements, and often, in the past, recruiting children to the cause. But those movements tended to be bigger and more embedded in social institutions (e.g. the Nazi Party, or the Klu Klux Klan). What is new and significant here is the like-men roles these women play - globe-trotting, public-speaking and writing political pot boilers. At the moment these women have to walk a line between demonstrating some power and articulating the inferiority of women.

We can’t wait around for these far right activists to show us their next moves. We have to articulate a socialist feminism that ideologically confronts the hate messages of the far right, aims to unite genders and turns social alienation into a class-based fight.



# The socialist roots of International Women's Day

This is an abridged version of an article by Janine Booth, first published in 2007.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the relatively-young capitalist system had thrown millions of women in industrially-developing countries into factories, domestic service and other work. Many occupations were gender segregated, and "women's work" – such as textiles – was often in the most appalling sweatshops, with low pay, terrible safety standards, and long hours. But at least workers were together, rather than isolated in the home, so they were able to fight back. Women workers, both unionised and not, organised industrial disputes to win better conditions.

Although women had become part of public life as workers, they were still excluded from public life as citizens – they did not have the vote. Women's suffrage movements grew across Britain, Europe, America and elsewhere. It was from this storm of protest and action that International Women's Day was born.

## Women's Suffrage

Organised by socialists, International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8 from 1913 to 1915 with women's parades and demonstrations in many European cities. Alexandra Kollontai explained why the early

International Women's Days focused on winning the vote for women: "in the last years before the war the rise in prices forced even the most peaceful housewife to take an interest in questions of politics and to protest loudly against the bourgeoisie's economy of plunder. 'Housewives uprisings' became increasingly frequent, flaring up at different times in Austria, England, France and Germany. The working women understood that it wasn't enough to break up the stalls at the market or threaten the odd merchant: They understood that such action doesn't bring down the cost of living. You have to change the politics of the government. And to achieve this, the working class has to see that the franchise is widened."

## 25 March 1911: The Triangle Fire

Less than a week after that first International Women's Day, over 140 workers died in the Triangle Fire in New York. Mostly young Jewish and Italian immigrant women, they burned to death when the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory where they worked caught fire. They died because working conditions were terrible and safety measures lacking, because capitalists pocket the profit they make from women's labour rather than spending it on civilised working conditions. Subsequent IWDs demanded workers' legal rights and improved safety standards to avert further disasters like this one.

1907

On March 8th, women demonstrated in New York, demanding votes for women and an end to child labour and sweatshops. It was the 50th anniversary of a major protest by women garment workers against poor working conditions and low wages, also in New York City.

1911

International Women's Day (IWD) was held on 19 March, with more than one million women and men attending IWD rallies in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, demanding women's rights to work, vote, be trained, to hold public office and end discrimination the first time. A million leaflets calling for action on the right to vote were distributed throughout Germany in the run-up to the Day.

1913-1914

As the First World War loomed, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February 1913. Women across Europe held peace rallies on 8 March 1913 and again in 1914.

1908

On the same day a year later, 15,000 women marched through New York demanding shorter hours, better pay, union rights and the vote, packing out Rutgers Square in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Most were garment workers, sick of the conditions in the needle trade factories described as "the vilest and foulest industrial sores of New York". The employers made the women pay for their needles, thread and even chairs!

1917

On the last Sunday of February (23rd), Russian women began a strike for "bread and peace", until four days later the Tsar was forced to abdicate. The provisional Government granted votes to women. 23rd February on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia is 8th March on the Gregorian calendar used elsewhere.

1909

Women shirtwaist makers staged a 13-week strike in 1909, known as the 'Rising of the 20,000'. Their fight won better conditions, and gave confidence to American workers for several generations to come. As strike leader Clara Lemlich said, "They used to say you couldn't even organise women. They wouldn't come to union meetings. They were 'temporary workers'. Well, we showed them!"

Russian revolutionary and feminist, Alexandra Kollontai, was in Germany at the time, and helped to organise the day. She wrote that it: "exceeded all expectations. Germany and Austria ... was one seething trembling sea of women. Meetings were organised everywhere....in the small towns and even in the villages, halls were packed so full that they had to ask (male) workers to give up their places for the women ... Men stayed home with their children for a change and their wives, the captive housewives, went to meetings. During the largest street demonstrations, in which 30,000 were taking part, the police decided to remove the demonstrators' banners: the women workers made a stand. In the scuffle that followed, bloodshed was averted only with the help of the socialist deputies in Parliament."

The Bolshevik leaders had apparently asked the women workers not to strike, but "when workers were locked out of the Putilov armaments plant on March 7 the women of Petrograd began to storm the streets. The wives, daughters and mothers of soldiers, previously as downtrodden and oppressed as prostitutes, demanded an end to their humiliation and angrily denounced all the hungry suffering of the past three years. Gathering strength and passion as they swept through the city over the next few days in food riots, political strikes and demonstrations, these women launched the first revolution in 1917." (Cathy Porter (1980), *Alexandra Kollontai*, 229)

1910

Clara Zetkin proposed to the International Congress of Socialist Women that "women the world over set aside a particular day each year to remember women and their struggles." ... "In agreement with the class conscious, political and trade union organisations of the proletariat of their respective countries, the socialist women of all countries will hold each year a women's day, whose foremost purpose it must be to aid the attainment of women's suffrage." Over 100 women from 17 countries unanimously agreed, deciding that on this day, socialists in all countries should hold big events, involving men and women in demanding improvements for working women.

In the West, International Women's Day continued during the 1910s and 1920s, but then died away, only reviving with the new wave of feminism in the 1960s. Since socialist women founded International Women's Day, it has been adopted by non-socialist feminists, governments and organisations which have little to do with women's rights. It is now more likely to be marked by an aromatherapy open day than by a march for women's rights. We should return to the original purpose of the Day: to mobilise support for working-class women's demands, and to celebrate the contribution that women make to the struggle for human liberation.