
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/Defending-women-s-rights-against-the-far-right>



Feminism

- IV Online magazine - 2026 - IVP614 - March 2026 -



Publication date: Sunday 8 March 2026

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

With the far right on the rise, it is vital to defend and extend women's rights. What does the spread of nostalgia politics mean for women?

Women today need to be aware of the threats to our hard-won rights, which are coming from the far right. The struggle against the far-right and fascism must include support for women's liberation. Many people, even those who may have contemplated voting for Reform UK, do not wish to see the total repeal of equality laws or the clock put back more than 50 years in terms of the type of families that exist or the equal rights women (and men) enjoy.

Romanticism and common sense

Sometimes the far-right appeals to nostalgia and paints a romanticised image of families in the past or to 'common sense' ideas about the roles of women and men in society. These ideas may appear attractive when working people and working-class families are struggling with financial pressures, stressful work, long working hours, and housing problems.

The absence of a strong trade union presence in many workplaces can make things worse. The lack of affordable social housing and the insufficient regulation of the private rented sector also hit working people hard.

What is left out of this picture is that the traditional family, which is presented as desirable, was often oppressive to its members in many ways, with rigid gender roles, coercive control, and domestic violence concealed within the privacy of the home.

The traditional nuclear family, in which men had all the responsibilities of financial provision and women all the responsibilities for domestic labour and childcare, divided the working class and put women in a vulnerable position of economic dependence. The myth of the male breadwinner also undermined women workers' struggles for equal pay.

Only two genders

This is a theme taken up by Trump, Putin, Orban, and other deplorable men. They deny the existence of intersex and non-binary people. The far-right also talks about 'gender ideology' by which they mean any attempt to explain differences between the lives of women and men in terms of social factors. This rejects an important concept in the social sciences: that gender is not the same as biological sex. Comparative analysis of societies and historical periods shows that gender roles vary and change over time.

The distinction that Second Wave Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s made between sex and gender was an attempt to free both women and men from rigid gender roles and to allow people to explore their full humanity. This distinction was necessary in a society in which arguments based on biological essentialism were widespread, and women were deemed incapable of doing a whole range of jobs, simply because we were women.

The talk of only two genders and rejection of 'gender ideology' is part of a moral panic the far-right tries to create around feminism, homosexuality, and trans rights. It also seeks to imply inaccurately that people's right to live as married heterosexuals is under attack, simply because some people live differently, showing the far-right's hostility to diversity.

AWFULs

The label 'AWFULs' is a good example of how sections of the far-right, including the MAGA (Make America Great Again) Republicans in the USA, object to any degree of female emancipation. This is a name given to women like Renee Nicole Good, who was shot by ICE agents in Minneapolis.

AWFULs stands for affluent, white, female, urban liberals. What is the reality behind this label?

Affluent: this does not necessarily mean rich, merely that the woman can afford a smartphone to record ICE agents breaking the US Constitution and can afford to live independently of men. This is deeply offensive to ultra-conservatives whose ideal family is one in which men have all the paid work, and women do all the unpaid work, and hence men have all the power and women have none.

These types think any wage above a pittance is too high a wage for a woman. They define female economic independence as a threat to the family.

White: The MAGA right view is that white people ought to be racist and are deviant if they believe in racial equality and rights for migrants and refugees.

Female: These people do not think women belong in the public sphere or should have any political opinions. Hence, it is improper or offensive for a woman to be politically active or take an interest in current affairs.

Urban: For some ultra conservatives, the countryside is a place of virtue where rural workers are deferential to their betters and cities are hotbeds of radical ideas, alternative lifestyles, and freedom to explore one's identity, which they find threatening.

Liberals: The far-right really do not like contemplating the other person's point of view. They do not see toleration or acceptance of diversity as virtues.

The label AWFULs sums up how feminists and independent women are everything the far-right detests.

Healthcare and race

Part of the current offensive on women's rights is an attack on healthcare. The repeal of Roe versus Wade in the USA in 2022 has created a situation where safe, legal abortions are available in some states, but not others. Women in some states are being denied necessary healthcare after miscarriage because doctors fear prosecution.

Internationally, cuts to aid budgets by the US and other governments are costing the lives of women in the Global

South, through lack of access to contraception and safe maternity care.

In the UK, abortion is currently available under the Abortion Act (1967), but we should be alert to the danger that a far-right government would seek to restrict this act and cut funding for women's healthcare.

There is currently a crisis in maternity care in the UK. This is partly a result of understaffing, but for Black women, the crisis in maternity care also arises from racism, with significantly worse health outcomes for Black women during pregnancy and childbirth.

Racism presents a threat to healthcare for all women and to our rights to bodily autonomy. Racists who believe in the 'great replacement' theory and want to impose 'remigration' on immigrant communities and bring about an all-white society want to force some women to have children, denying access to birth control, and to force sterilisation on others.

Equality Act (2010)

Before the 2024 General Election and again now, Reform UK has declared its intention to repeal the Equality Act (2010). They claim to do this on grounds of meritocracy, thus implying that if women, ethnic minorities, and other minority groups are hired, this is on a quota basis, rather than merit.

The reality is the opposite. Legislation was introduced in the 1970s (Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, Race Relations Act, 1976) to ensure selection on merit, rather than denying women and other oppressed groups the right to apply for jobs or be considered seriously as candidates.

- The Equality Act 2010 incorporated (and hence repealed):
- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Sex Discrimination Act 1986
- Race Relations (Remedies) Act 1994
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995

And parts of many other acts dealing with matters of equality.

So, abolishing the Equality Act (2010) would remove protection against discrimination for many groups of people. The Equality Act (2010) defines nine protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership (in employment only); pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

Abolishing the Equality Act (2010) would give bigots an opportunity to voice their prejudices openly. In this sense, it would be a re-run of the hatred unleashed by the Brexit vote. It would mean people in the UK had no legal recourse against unfair discrimination in education, training, employment, promotion, pay, pensions, and the provision of goods and services. This could mean:

- An employer choosing to pay men and women different rates of pay for doing the same job.
- Job advertisements specifying the sex of the worker whom the employer wishes to recruit, without any justifiable

reason.

- Workers sacked for becoming pregnant.

For people who have grown up with legal equality as normal, such a world would be something of a shock, but this is what a vote for Reform UK at the next general election could mean. Already, Reform-controlled councils have abolished posts concerned with promoting equality and diversity.

Equality monitoring

Equality monitoring is an important tool for implementing equality policies. It enables assessment of how equal organisations are (or are not) in areas such as employment and the provision of public services. At present there is too little equality monitoring by employers. If the Equality Act (2010) were abolished, there would be no legal pressure to undertake equality monitoring.

Why does monitoring matter? Firstly, it provides a statistical basis for measuring the extent of discrimination. This means that claims of discrimination cannot be dismissed simply as “that’s your opinion” or “that was only your experience”. Monitoring provides an overview that indicates whether some groups are experiencing inequality.

In addition to demonstrating the extent of inequality, equality monitoring can also be used to set equality targets and measure progress towards them.

The public sphere

Feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, from the eighteenth century onwards, argued for the right of women to education and to a place in the public sphere. Feminists such as John Stuart Mill proposed legislation to give women the right to vote. The history of First Wave Feminism is a history of the struggle for the vote, for education, and the right to enter spheres of employment from which women were barred (e.g., medicine).

It is also a history of struggle for women’s right to be citizens, to be political people, eligible to stand for public office and take part in political debate, rather than being confined to a domestic and private sphere.

If we look at the far right in the world today, we must ask how far women’s place in the public sphere is under threat. Far-right governments often have very few or no women ministers, unlike the much more gender-balanced cabinets of liberal democracies. They attack reproductive rights, employment rights, and anti-discrimination laws.

Sometimes, far-right governments are underpinned by religious fundamentalists who advocate openly for patriarchy and unequal families in which men assume the role of ‘head of the household’, a concept the UK census has now abandoned as outdated.

In this context, we must salute the victims of sex trafficking who are speaking out about their experiences of being trafficked by Epstein and his associates. It is often a struggle for women’s voices to be heard, especially when reporting the crimes of the powerful.

Conclusion

The experiences of women worldwide show that equal rights can never be taken for granted. Women today, and others who support women's equality, need to be active in defending equality laws and policies, as well as reproductive rights.

We must oppose moves to force a return to narrow and rigid gender roles and continue to advocate the feminist vision of a fully human existence for women, men, and non-binary people. The struggle against the far-right needs to address its sexism and misogyny, as well as its racism and authoritarianism.

5 March 2026

Source: [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.