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Transgender socialism

- Features - Sexual politics -



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There remains a world to win for transgender people, but what kind of socialism is capable of winning it? Echo Fortune gives her answer.

A civil war tears through the British left. The personal is always political, but this conflict brings that point uncomfortably close to home.

This contest of power is fought over whether my trans sisters, brothers, and siblings, and I, should be permitted to live as ourselves. It is fought over access to facilities, medicines, and recognition. It is fought over socialism.

The stake is not the one framed for us by our enemies, with their liberal platitudes, identity politics, and pseudo-materialism, but the core of the socialist project. The question posed is as old as politics: what is freedom?

For trans people, freedom is bodily autonomy, harm reduction, free association, and solidarity. For the reactionary left, it is identity, paternalism, liberal rights, and conservatism. It is [Antigone versus Creon](#). It is one manifestation of [Hal Draper's](#) two souls of socialism, asking if socialism should be imposed or fought for.

Praxis, the marriage of theory and practice in shared struggle, is on the line. Struggle is the beating heart of the socialist vision articulated by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and the best of the anarchist tradition. It is how we learn and arrive at our politics, as well as the world we wish to birth. One in which humanity consciously takes up the reins of her destiny.

Duncan Chapel describes the usual unfolding of this conflict in the branches of socialist organisations, whether parties, unions, etc. He outlines a process that begins with a meeting and concludes with battle lines that cluster reactionary socialists against our liberationist socialism:

There is a pattern, and by now it should be familiar. A branch meeting. A motion. A veteran of the left, decades of credentials intact, suddenly finding that those credentials are being questioned not because of what she has done but because of what she refuses to believe. The response is swift: "witch hunt," "free speech," the predictable retreat behind the vocabulary of liberal rights which this current had previously dismissed as a bourgeois distraction. And then, filling the comment sections, comes the coalition you might have predicted if you were paying attention: materialist feminists, anti-woke culture warriors, campist commentators who have spent the last three years explaining why NATO bears primary responsibility for the invasion of Ukraine. All defending the same person. All using the same arguments.

Duncan Chapel, [Red Mole Substack](#)

The reason the right has gained so much ground through its relentless assault on trans life is that it effectively exploits this division. The left retreats into itself, erects barriers to solidarity, and pauses our demands. As socialists and transgender people, we reject that failed strategy.

We must unite, support one another, and embolden our claims on bourgeois society.

Anti*Capitalist Resistance proudly plays our role in this fight back. We organise protests, write motions, and listen to trans voices inside and outside of our organisation. We are there at Trans Pride, we argue with transphobia and transmisogyny on the left, and we show up in solidarity for trans people.

Identity as process

Identity politics was coined by the Black feminist Combahee River Collective. Despite frequent mischaracterisations, they were foremost humanists, and the statement is worth reading in full.

The purpose of their politics was not to elevate Black womanhood or lock Black women into their identities, but to achieve a world beyond categories of oppression. They demanded a world without limits on human flourishing and saw their task as achieving that, which they tied to their social experiences.

We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.

[The Combahee River Collective](#)

The term is also often linked to [Kimberlé Crenshaw's](#) metaphor of the intersection of oppressions, which she used to describe people who experience multiple, overlapping forms of oppression, creating a new social relation.

Because her work focused on liberal jurisprudence, Crenshaw's theory lacks a qualitative and class character. However, intersectional theory can be partially incorporated into a socialist understanding of the world by understanding layered oppressions as original sites of oppression.

These terms have often been taken up and retheorised by people from different politics, including broadly liberal, reactionary, marxist, anarchist, and social democratic perspectives. Adding to the confusion, some of these appropriations have been used to caricature or criticise others' use of theory or their claimed experiences of oppression.

Today, it is meaningful to discuss the identity politics of people who do not experience oppression in the specific sense used by the Combahee River Collective and Crenshaw. That is, the identities of the oppressors. One theorist of identity who also did this, but from a marxist standpoint, was [Franz Fanon](#).

Fanon wrote on the development of the consciousness of settlers and the colonised, borrowing from Hegel's master-slave dialectic. He describes what he calls a Manichean consciousness, in which the value system of the settler (that robs the colonised of their humanity and goodness) is inverted:

The natives' challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute. The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil.

Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Reversed, this logic reclaims the humanity of the colonised by denying the humanity of the settler. Here, we can see a tension between these two identities, one that can be carefully applied to different experiences of oppression (with caveats), wherein one identity formation exists based on the denial of another.

The end point for Fanon, as with the Combahee River Collective, was a universal humanity not narrowed by oppression. To borrow from this logic, we cannot expect the oppressed to pursue a universal humanity while they cannot look into a mirror and see a human being.

Achieving this, however, is a process. One that achieves that universality by abolishing the oppressor by liberating them from the oppression in which they share. A mutually reinforcing system based on dehumanisation comes to an end by transcending the identities of the oppressor, leaving us all as human beings.

What next?

Is there still a world to win? That query invites a despairing look into the balance of forces, but our answer must remain yes, however conditional. Trans people upset the basis of social reproduction in class society; our lives are a radical challenge to a prevailing order built on a strict adherence to biology as destiny. This has gendered and racialised implications, which is why Black trans women sex workers have often been at the forefront of queer struggle.

That order is powerful not because it operates conspiratorially through capitalist networks of control, although it can and often does, but because it is woven through the textured, daily activity of every person in class society. Two lines from Marx, taken together, encapsulate this reality in which we find ourselves chained:

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

Karl Marx, [A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy](#)

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.

Karl Marx, [The German Ideology](#)

If we accept these claims that are a part of the bedrock of Marxism, we should understand why the forces against us prove consistently dominant and inarguable. It is not because this system is natural. Rather, those forces align with the interests of most people most of the time. How, then, do we break free?

Trans people alone cannot accomplish this feat. While our challenge to social norms is powerful, because of that very challenge, our real lives are peripheral, precarious, and too often fleeting. The tension of trans life is to be both a threat to power and weak in the face of it.

We are the crisis. We expose the daily despair everyone experiences living under gendered conditions. The restrictions on our freedom are a restriction on the freedom of every living cisgendered person, too. And we are not going away.

Your Party has been a vector for this fight, as the Green Party has been. Socialists in both must be as uncompromisingly for a vision of the world that includes trans people as those who wish to exclude us are against it. This is not a secondary question to party organising because it determines the type of party that will exist.

Our demand as trans people and socialists in solidarity with trans people on cisgendered people is the essential demand of all oppressed people: for universal, human liberation. Again, this is not abstract. You, too, need bodily autonomy, access to healthcare, and social recognition. And our repression now is a sketch of yours to come.

The demand of trans liberation is only that cisgender people side with their own humanity.

We are not divided. We are one class.

International and human.

[Anticapitalist Resistance](#)

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