

DEFEND THE GAINS WE HAVE WON

In 1971, there was a national Women's Liberation demonstration in London. Two of the demands were 'Equal Pay' and 'Equal Educational and Job Opportunity'.

The idea that women (and men and non-binary people) should enjoy equal pay for work of equal value and equal educational and job opportunities is so apparent to many people nowadays that it might not seem worth writing about. In many countries today, young women grow up expecting equal rights.

It is taken for granted that women can have education, jobs, and, if we choose, marry and have children. This is not the world that existed between the First and Second World Wars when women in teaching and the civil service lost their jobs at marriage. Before employment protection legislation in the 1970s, women workers could be sacked for having a baby.

Many women and our male allies struggled for decades to achieve equal rights. The second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement succeeded in many countries in getting equal rights enshrined in law and equal opportunity programmes in the workplace. Women organised in our trade unions to win support for equal pay, equal educational and job opportunities, maternity leave and pay, reproductive rights and women's liberation.

In 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act outlawed sex discrimination in education and employment, and the Equal Pay Act (1970) was enacted. Before 1975, it was lawful for job advertisements to specify the worker's sex and for men and women to be paid different rates for doing the same job. These equal rights are now part of the Equality Act (2010).

Why are these rights so important? The right to education is the right to develop as a full human being, learn and enjoy learning, and gain qualifications for employment.

Equal educational opportunity is necessary for equal job opportunity. Equality in employment is vital for the right to use education and abilities, to be economically independent and to live as a citizen. The assertion of these equal rights is about women's rights to be people and not be defined only by a domestic role.

There are still gains that need to be made in ending the gender pay gap, stopping sexual harassment in the workplace and improving the position of women workers in temporary and precarious jobs. Sex segregation and inequality in many areas of employment still needs challenging.

In Afghanistan today, our sisters are denied the right to education, to employment, to any place in public life, and even to be heard in public. This gender apartheid must be ended.

Today, we must defend the rights achieved in the past that Trump and other far-right politicians would take away. We must demand these rights for all women worldwide. ★



Photo by Steve Eason



This broadsheet is put together by the **Anti★Capitalist Resistance** women's and non-binary collective including Sandra Wyman, Melissa Taylor, Susan Pashkoff, Alice Nuttall, Liz Lawrence, Echo Fortune, Terry Conway and NJ Catchpole. We have focused here on far-right attacks on women, on bodily autonomy, on violence and the family, and on the need to defend rights such as those to education and equal pay that were won by the earlier women's liberation movement. On each of these topics, and the many we didn't choose here, there is so much more we could have said ... but we don't have the space.

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NO TO GILEAD

Far-right movements are defined by misogyny and patriarchy. They promote strictly defined gender binaries, with men occupying the public realm as leaders, breadwinners and providers, and women kept strictly to the private sphere as helpmeets, keeping house and raising children.

They encourage violence against women with misogyny and attempts to remove women's economic independence. They cut funding for rape crisis centres and women's aid – facilities that need more support, not less. We also need more education, encouraging women and girls to assert their rights to equality, and men and boys not to be perpetrators of violence against women.

The far-right weaponise a narrative of 'protecting women' – or at least, those who fit their tradwife ideal of cishet, middle-class white women – to legitimise their stance against marginalised people. 'Protecting [white] women and girls' has been the rallying cry behind racist

violence from the murder of Emmett Till in the USA in 1955 to Britain's anti-migrant riots in the summer of 2024.

Their aim is not to protect women, even the narrow subset that they define as 'true women', but to demonise trans people, migrants, and people of colour. Far-right ideology ultimately denies agency even to women and girls who fit its narrow criteria.

Anti-trans ideology similarly uses a facade of 'protecting [cis] women and girls' to lend their movement an air of legitimacy and disguise exclusionary tactics as 'safety measures'. There is no evidence that trans-inclusive social policies negatively impact the safety of cis women and girls. The vast majority of violence occurs in the home.

Far-right organisations, and the 'gender-critical' groups that they have frequently turned up to support, repeatedly fail to call out the white, cishet family members who carry out the ▶

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◀ majority of abuse. They ignore or excuse misogynistic violence by their members.

Instead, they focus on instances of abuse carried out by a member of a marginalised group and extrapolate that individual's actions across a demographic.

Gender-critical anti-trans activism leads to attacks not only on trans women but on cis women with 'masculine' physical traits. Butch lesbian women have been confronted or assaulted in women's toilets after being assumed to be trans. The 2024 Olympics saw boxer Imane Khelif join the many Black and brown cis women athletes who have had their gender questioned because they are muscular and excel at their sports.

Allowing far-right ideology to gain ground under its banner of 'protecting women' strengthens systems which harm all women and girls. US Republicans, pre- and post-election, framed migrants as dangerous rapists and trans women as nefarious cheaters intent on destroying women's sports. Now the party is ramping up attempts to restrict abortion further, defund Planned Parenthood, and strike down anti-discrimination legislation. Trump has spoken about banning women's boxing. And

many prominent Republicans – including Trump himself – have been credibly accused of raping or abusing women and girls.

As feminists who oppose the far-right, we need to debunk their pernicious arguments. We also need to signal-boost marginalised people and socialist and progressive talking points to take up the space the far right has been allowed to monopolise. Our focus is on building a world where all genders are safe because, in a secure world, protection is not necessary. ★



OUR BODIES, OUR LIVES, OUR RIGHT TO DECIDE

Bodily autonomy is the principle that every individual should control their body and what happens to it. This underlies global feminist resistance to the acts of violence and control that disproportionately affect women, including forced sterilisation and restrictions on medical procedures like abortion. The same framework has been adopted by trans people who are resisting ongoing, widespread attacks on their healthcare and are fighting for control over when and how their bodies change.

Although different groups experience differing bodily restrictions, these often have a shared root. Recent American misogynistic and anti-trans medical restrictions are enacted by the same largely male, predominantly Republican politicians to enforce traditional gender roles.

Some people's freedom over their bodies is especially politicised. Disabled people and young people are often subject to paternalistic control due to infantilisation. They are seen as incapable of making decisions about their own lives.

One of the most fundamental questions of bodily autonomy for those able to get pregnant is to be able to choose if, when and how many children to have. This requires access to a wide variety of contraceptives, to choose voluntary sterilisation if desired, not to be forcibly sterilised and to access safe abortion on demand. The inability to make these choices without constraint impacts our ability to determine our life paths.

Even where reproductive healthcare choices are legal or decriminalised, racist, disablist, misogynist and queerphobic class society means that this right is often a negative one.

Rights are formally there but not genuinely accessible due to poverty, inability to access the right contraceptives, forced contraceptive usage to get welfare benefits, etc. Moreover, religious beliefs, social constraints, and cultural and class pressures limit our ability to make independent decisions.

The historical linkage in most advanced capitalist countries between the eugenics and birth control movements has meant that different constraints exist for racialised, disabled, working-class women and trans women compared to white cis women with higher incomes. While white middle-class women had to get their husband's permission for voluntary sterilisation, sterilisation abuse (forced sterilisation due to eugenics, to get benefits, to get released from prison) has predominantly impacted the most marginalised in our societies. Indigenous, Black and Latina women were often sterilised following births.

Disabled women were the first to face eugenic sterilisations and routinely face pressure not to have children. They are still viewed as unable to care for children. In several countries, trans people are still forcibly sterilised when they transition.

Organising around bodily autonomy plays out differently for different groups but also enables solidarity between all of us who have common interests to fight for this framework. We fight for reproductive justice, to minimise the constraints on our choices, and for the voices of the marginalised who must be central to this struggle. ★

VIOLENCE BEGINS AT HOME

Q: Why do men abuse women?

A: Because they can.

For centuries in this country, religious institutions and the judiciary, while claiming not to condone violence, supported the idea that men should be allowed to punish 'disobedient' wives. 'Obey' remained a compulsory vow for women in established church marriage services until 2022.

In English law, husbands were allowed to 'chastise' their wives for disobedience (including physically) until as late as 1976. The Domestic Violence Act 2021 included emotional and economic abuse and coercive control but failed to protect immigrants or give funding for refuges.

Much current rhetoric about sexual violence focuses on 'stranger danger', but women are at far greater risk of assault and murder in their own homes or at the hands of men known to them. This includes trans women like Brianna Ghey who was murdered by two people – one of whom she thought was a friend. And Gisele Pelicot was drugged and hired out by her husband for rape by others.

According to Refuge, one woman is killed every five days by an abusive partner. Many women endure abuse for an average of seven years before reaching out for help. Abuse may affect anyone, regardless of class, race, disability, being LGBTQIA+, or whether they live in rural or urban communities.

A lot of support for those experiencing abuse comes from voluntary organisations funded by charitable donations. Whilst some support for

refuges comes from local authorities, budget cuts have led to a major reduction.

Some larger organisations such as Refuge and many smaller organisations are trans inclusive, but the Women's Aid Federation allows local branches to determine their own policies, making it risky for trans women to approach refuges. Though trans inclusive organisations such as Loving Me exist they are less well known. Many trade unions offer practical support to members, but this is not widely advertised.

A huge amount needs to be done in terms of inter-agency funding and practice to educate doctors, teachers, priests and religious leaders and others likely to have contact with those affected, as well as those most closely involved such as police officers and social workers.

Most importantly, educating boys and girls in all sectors – primary and secondary – plus young adults – to counter negative 'tough guy' / 'quiet girl' stereotypes needs prioritisation at government and national level. The increasing influence of incel culture and figures such as the 'influencer' Andrew Tate makes this even more urgent: already there are reports of teenage boys chanting 'your body my choice'.

There is also a real need for greater focus on safeguarding structures for younger women, such as students, who are away from home and familiar means of support for the first time.

We acknowledge that many men also abhor violence against women. We value them as active allies. ★