

PRIDE, POLITICS AND PROTEST

A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Liberation



A **Socialist Worker** pamphlet
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Pride, Politics and Protest:

A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Liberation 2nd edition
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Published February 2021.

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PO Box 74955, London E16 9EJ

ISBN 978 1 914143 14 4

Cover image by Guy Smallman

Introduction

THE HISTORY of socialist struggles and socialist movements is also a history of fighting oppression. Creating a socialist society must also involve creating the conditions for ending oppression, including the oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) people. Building a socialist world, run by working class people from the bottom up, requires winning masses of people to a vision of a new sort of society. It's one where racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia are recognised for the cruel, pernicious and divisive ideas that they are.

This is no easy task. Many people are torn between hopes for a better world—and a feeling that the rich and powerful who run the capitalist system are too strong to get rid of. But a look at history shows that revolutions can win and that ordinary people can bring down even the most cruel of regimes and dictators. Although class struggle ebbs and flows, revolutionary movements emerge time and time again when masses of people feel they cannot go on living and suffering in the same old way. And, when people unite against a common enemy in those struggles, they can begin to break from bigoted ideas that the ruling class use to divide us.

In the last decade we've seen uprisings, revolts and mass social movements sweep across the world. In 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement exploded worldwide in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and put challenging institutional racism centre stage. In the US it involved 26 million people, making it the biggest social movement in the country's history. There was a huge street movement for abortion rights in Poland and workers' strikes against dictatorship in neighbouring Belarus. In recent years people rose up in Lebanon, Nigeria, Chile, Hong Kong, Ecuador, Sudan, and in the Yellow Vest movement and mass strikes in France. And we've also seen the climate strikes by school students, the #MeToo movement and mass protests against Donald Trump.

Every strike, revolt and social movement poses key questions—who rules? And, how do those resisting win their immediate demands and, more fundamentally, their liberation? LGBT+ people, too, have serious questions about how to win the liberation we crave from the alienation and oppression we face. This pamphlet, now substantially revised and updated in a new edition, seeks to offer answers to these crucial questions.

In the following pages we offer a Marxist explanation of the roots of homophobia and transphobia, why we need to build united opposition to the attacks on LGBT+ people, and how we can fight for genuine liberation.



Refugees on Pride in London in 2019



Katya Jones (left) and Nicola Adams (right)—Strictly’s first same-sex couple in 2020

Are LGBT+ rights secure?

CAMPAIGNS, PROTESTS and lobbying by LGBT+ people and our supporters have undeniably won important steps towards equal rights in many countries since the 1960s. In Britain male homosexuality was not only illegal until 1967, but considered to be a “mental illness” until 1993. Being transgender was listed as “Gender Identity Disorder” in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), a psychiatric publication used by the health industry. This only changed with its current edition, DSM 5 published in 2012, when it was renamed Gender Dysphoria. But since the millennium, we’ve seen important steps forward for legal equality in Britain. The right to civil partnerships was passed in 2005, followed by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in 2013. For the first time transgender people won some legal rights with the passage of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The Equality Act of 2010 was also hugely important for LGBT+ people, not least because it insists on parity of legal protection for the nine oppressed categories it covers.

British social attitude surveys show that people in general, and especially young people, have become more LGBT+ friendly since the 1980s. Many more people, including sporting icons and other celebrities, have felt able to come out as gay, trans or non-binary. A significant number of TV adverts, for example, have featured gay relationships or even trans models. And, for the first time, the popular Strictly Come Dancing show included a same sex couple in 2020. Trans people have become much more visible in recent decades, helped by the almost universal availability of the internet and social media. This has been

A note on terminology

MANY PEOPLE may be unfamiliar with terminology around sexual orientation and gender identity. Terminology, like language in general, is continually evolving.

New terms emerge and others shift their meaning. For example, the term **heteronormative** is now much more commonly used to describe a society where heterosexual assumptions and expectations are built into its very fabric.

Using **Gay** to describe homosexual people has been around since the late 1960s. And it was adopted as the term denoting openness and pride in one's sexuality and defiance in the face of homophobia.

People may use various other terms to describe their sexuality or gender identity. These include **pansexual**, **asexual**, **polyamorous**, **gender fluid**, **agender**, **aromantic**, **demisexual**, **bigender**, **bicurious**.

People have increasingly used the term **non-binary** in recent years, referring to people who do not identify with either element of the gender binary. More and more, people will also specify which pronouns they would prefer to be addressed by (she/her, he/him, they/them, and so on).

Another example of change is the umbrella term **transgender** or **trans** to describe all those who may be gender variant in some way. Some feel that **trans***—with the asterisk—is more inclusive of a variety of gender identities and expressions.

Conversely, **cis-gender** or **cis** has come into use to refer to people whose gender identity is consistent with their assigned birth gender. Cis is seen as the opposite of trans. However, some

LGBT+ people may not want to describe themselves in binary terms— gay/straight, trans/cis, for example. They might describe themselves as **queer** or **genderqueer** instead. Others are wary of using the term “queer” because of its traditional use by homophobes and bigots, and because they feel that we don't change thinking and ideas by changing words.

Most trade unions do not include queer in the names of their equality sections. In this pamphlet, we have mainly used the acronym **LGBT+** because it is still the most common and accepted term in use, particularly in the trade union movement.

Today most trade unions have model rights at work policies on sexual orientation and gender identity which will give all sorts of guidance about LGBT+ terminology and issues. The TUC union federation also has model policies and guidelines, glossaries of terms and information and advice. Other links to useful organisations have been included at the end of this pamphlet.



First Stonewall anniversary march, New York, 1970

reflected in the numbers of people, especially young trans people, seeking referral to gender identity clinics.

However, it's important to remember that these advances have not just been gifted to LGBT+ people. They are the results of decades of struggle by support and advocacy groups, socialists and the trade union movement. Yet, with these advances, some might ask what's the problem? Isn't it true that LGBT+ people have equal rights? Surely society is now more tolerant and accepting of LGBT+ people who can, more or less, live their lives openly? Unfortunately, the situation is much more contradictory than this.

LGBT+ oppression— still a scourge

THE RIGHTS we've won in some countries come against a backdrop of continuing high levels of homophobia and rising levels of transphobia. Many surveys reveal that in Britain LGBT+ people still face institutional discrimination in employment, healthcare and access to services, as well as an increase in reported hate crime, harassment and abuse.

The situation for LGBT+ people in some other countries is much worse. There are 51 countries where a conviction for homosexuality can get you a jail term from a year to life. Some have recently passed more restrictive laws, although a few have relaxed them. In many countries it is almost impossible to be out as gay or trans without risking your life or liberty. Even in those countries where being out may be semi-tolerated, LGBT+ people are marginalised economically and socially. And they are at much higher risk of mental distress, self-harm, HIV/Aids, hate crime and suicide.

While in Britain there isn't a wide-scale stripping away of legal rights, that doesn't mean LGBT+ people aren't a target. For instance, Boris Johnson's Tory government cut vital funding for LGBT+ awareness programmes in schools in autumn 2020. Other recent surveys, including by Stonewall, the TUC union federation and pollster Gallop, have shown how rife homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools, colleges and workplaces is.

All this comes against a backdrop of attacks on LGBT+ people. The mass shooting at the gay nightclub Pulse in Orlando, US, in 2016 sent shockwaves across the world. The shooter killed 49 people and injured a further 53. It was the deadliest incident in the history of anti-LGBT+ violence in the US and at the time was the deadliest mass shooting in the country's history.

A report by Galop in 2019 showed that recorded LGBT+ hate crime had doubled in the previous three years. In London homophobic hate crimes increased from

(left) **LGBT+ protest in Russia, 2013**



1,488 in 2014 to 2,308 in 2018. One of the most high profile incidents left two LGBT+ women, Chris and Melania, bloodied after an attack on a night bus in the capital in 2019. They were physically attacked and robbed after refusing to kiss.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in society. More than 100,000 people had died in Britain at the time writing this pamphlet in January 2021—many of them totally avoidable deaths. As well as the deaths, the lockdown restrictions and job losses have had a disproportionate impact on black and Asian people and other oppressed groups, including LGBT+ people. Coronavirus has also deepened capitalist crisis. As the situation's worsened, working class people's living standards have suffered huge assaults.

Political polarisation has deepened. Far right groups—as well as mainstream parties—have increasingly turned on oppressed people to divide resistance in order to shore up the system.

In particular, Muslims, migrants, refugees and trans people provide useful targets for the right wing to promote hostile policies. The right has also sought to whip up “culture war” issues, such as trans or abortion rights, which allow them to paper over class differences. They have attacked gender studies in academia, #MeToo and pro-choice campaigns. And they have sought to promote claims that a mythical “Gender Ideology” is being promoted by left wingers to “subvert human nature” and that BLM is a “Marxist” movement out to destroy civilisation.

Rising transphobia

THE SITUATION in Britain has been especially acute for trans people. Half of trans people in Britain felt less able to go out as a result of physical, sexual and verbal attacks, according to a Galop report in November 2020. And two-thirds said they were unable to use public toilets for fear of attack. Trans and non-binary people were particularly badly hit in the pandemic.

Many support groups struggled to offer the same levels of help online as they could face to face. Trans people seeking referrals to gender identity clinics had appointments—already on waiting lists of two years or longer—cancelled or further delayed. Lockdowns often meant having to continue living in very difficult circumstances, including with family members or others who might be hostile and transphobic.

A number of transphobic groups were formed after 2016 following now shelved government proposals to review the Gender Recognition Act. They falsely claimed that improving trans rights would undermine women's rights.

Under the 2004 Act, trans people are made to go through a medical diagnosis, wait at least two years to legally change their gender and pay a £140 fee. Self-identification would allow trans people to change their legal gender after affirming it to a registrar. Many of those opposed to GRA reform rely on the transphobic trope that trans women are men who want to invade women's spaces.

These sorts of transphobic and “trans-critical” voices in the media have contributed to increased harassment and abuse of trans and non-binary people. And they have also mounted propaganda campaigns to block improvements to trans rights and to roll back existing rights.

In late 2020 a High Court ruling severely restricted much needed access to puberty blocking (PB) medication for trans and non-binary people under the age of 18. Such

medication, which is reversible, puts on hold the largely irreversible and sometimes distressing physical changes of puberty, such as breast development or beard growth. The High Court case was brought jointly by someone who de-transitioned and a mother concerned that her child—that hadn't even been referred to a clinic—might access PBs. They were backed by a number of transphobic groups. The judges took evidence from Transgender Trend—a transphobic group—but not from pro-trans groups such as the trans children's charity Mermaids.

That court ruling also potentially opened the door to attacks by right wing bigots on young people's legal access to contraception, abortion and other medical procedures outside of parental approval.

Over a decade of austerity

AS SOON as the Tories won the 2019 general election, they announced that “austerity was over”. These claims vanished once the coronavirus crisis hit.

Millions of working class people—and women in particular—had already borne the brunt of austerity in the years that followed the global crash of 2007-08. These years were devastating for LGBT+ people.

Workers in both the public and private sectors widely suffered average pay cuts of as much as 30 percent. Real wages remain below 2008 levels for huge numbers of working class people. And, never wanting to let a good crisis go to waste, the Tory government used the coronavirus crisis to pour billions of pounds into their friends' pockets.

They did this rather than properly funding public health and a publicly administered test, trace and isolate system. Many thousands of people have died since March 2020. All of this has impacted very seriously on LGBT+ people's lives and well-being.

Rates of homelessness, unemployment, poverty, mental distress and suicide are all higher among LGBT+ people than the rest of the population. Since 2010 when the Tories came in homelessness has increased by 165 percent according to government figures.

It has increased by 22 percent last year alone, according to the Office for National Statistics. The Albert Kennedy Trust has estimated that 24 percent of young homeless people are LGBT+.

Funding for local authorities has been slashed, leading to service closures, redundancies and huge cuts in what support groups can offer, if anything. Cuts to the Disability Living Allowance during ten years of austerity made independent living almost impossible for many LGBT+ people.

In 2018 the TUC union federation reported mental health services were at breaking point because of cuts. Around 31 percent of LGB+ people reported suicidal thoughts, far higher than the general population. Trans people were found to be at particular risk of suicide, with 46 percent having thought about killing themselves in the last year.

Meanwhile, a UN report estimated that as many as 75 percent of bisexual women had been raped or sexually assaulted.

These women are especially vulnerable as they are more likely to need refuges which have had their funding cut by £7 million—at least a third—since 2010. As a result tens of thousands of referrals have been refused by refuges due to lack of space or cuts to funding.

Roots of LGBT+ oppression

TO FIGHT for LGBT+ liberation, we need to arm ourselves with a theoretical understanding about why oppression exists. Many people understandably think that oppression, whether homophobia, sexism or racism, is a natural part of human nature and society. Others see discrimination rooted in backward ideas or perhaps religion. But Marxists argue that LGBT+ oppression is rooted in capitalism. A wealth of historical and anthropological evidence shows oppression hasn't always existed—and that different forms of sexual orientation and gender identity have. The main institution that has shaped and controlled our sexuality is the family. In class society, the family is how the next generation is reared and it is shaped by how production is organised. In Ancient Greek and Roman society, for instance, production was based around a slave economy and the family unit wasn't that important. There was a greater separation between sex and procreation and sex between men and between women was largely accepted as normal.

However, during the Middle Ages “feudal” production was based around the family. This meant that the idea of sex for procreation became more important. The feudal ruling class used Christianity to justify its ideas about sexual morality and the church took on a more important role within marriages.

A whole set of rules for married couples were developed—right down to what positions were acceptable. While these ideas emphasised sex for procreation, there was no systematic LGBT+ oppression or even such as a concept as “homosexuality” or a “homosexual person”. This changed with the rise of capitalism.

‘Homosexuality’ is created

CAPITAL THREW out many of the old religious ideas, but it also adapted and repackaged some of them for its own ends. Gay historian John D’Emilio put it in 1992, “On the one hand, capitalism continually weakens the material foundation of family life, making it possible for individuals to live outside the family, and for a lesbian and gay male identity to develop. On the other, it needs to push men and women into families, at least long enough to reproduce the next generation of workers.

“The elevation of the family to ideological pre-eminence guarantees that a capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexism and homophobia. In the most profound sense, capitalism is the problem.”

The factory system in early capitalism had profound effects on society. In Frederick Engels’ classic study, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, he described how industrial capitalism, with mass migration to the cities and extreme poverty and privation, was destroying the working class family.

The developing capitalist system and urbanisation were creating the conditions for the emergence of freer and more varied sexual relationships and gender identities among working class people. It was simultaneously undermining the family’s role in reproducing the next generation of workers.

The potential destruction of the working class family in early capitalism horrified many

in the ruling class. It led reformers in the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class, to look for means to ensure its survival in the longer-term interests of capitalism. Legislation to control child labour and to create the “family wage”—intended to exclude women from industrial occupations—was introduced. This was intended to maintain the privatised reproduction of labour through the promotion of the working class nuclear family, modelled on the bourgeois family.

Such material and legislative changes had to be underpinned with an ideological drive emphasising sexual fidelity, at least for women, and strict regulation of sexual behaviour. Homosexuality and other “deviant” sexual and gender variant behaviour became increasingly heavily proscribed from the latter half of the 19th century. The trial and jailing of Oscar Wilde in 1895 were a watershed. A crucial outcome of this process of proscription was the creation of the category “homosexual person”. Homosexuality became an identity, a type of person, rather than a type of activity.

This emerging identification of a “homosexual person” at around the turn of the 20th century led to growing resistance to the repression of gay people. In particular it began to coalesce around early socialist campaigners such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter in Britain and Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany.

The family has changed... but remains

CHANGES WITHIN capitalism in the middle of the 20th century led to the ruling class making concessions to demands for “homosexuality reform”. The 1950s was a period of sexual repression. But it had been preceded by growing freedom during the Second World War. It had undermined the rigid structures of the nuclear family. Men joined the military and many women entered the workforce and no longer had to care for their evacuated children. A Mass Observation Survey in the Royal Army Medical Corps showed sexual activity between male soldiers was openly taking place, with one observer noting that some were already “well versed in these arts”. Women drafted into the Land Army as agricultural labour also had more opportunities to explore their sexuality.

The right responded with a moral panic. David R Mace of the Marriage Guidance Council summed up their fears in the right wing *Spectator* magazine. “Never in human history has family life suffered disintegration upon a scale commensurate with that which the past six years had witnessed,” he complained.

Gay men suffered terrible repression and thousands were purged from their jobs.

However, while the new welfare state was partly supposed to strengthen the family, it also alleviated some of women’s burdens



(left) **Idealisation of the nuclear family**

The far right and assaults on our rights

FROM BRAZIL'S Jair Bolsonaro to Hungary's Victor Orban, a range of far right and right wing forces have grown in strength across the world in the last decade. Where they're in power, LGBT+ people are a prime target for repression.

On 7 August 2020, Polish police staged a mass arrest of LGBT+ people in the capital Warsaw. Hundreds had gathered in the city to protest against the arrest of Margot Szutowicz, co-founder of Stop Bzdurom (Stop Bullshit) collective. Szutowicz had already been arrested, then released, in June.

Her crime was allegedly damaging a "family values" group's truck, which was plastered with propaganda linking homosexuality and pedophilia. A court ordered Szutowicz's detention ahead of trial from 7 August. On the day cops arrested 48 people—some protesters, others bystanders—in an event dubbed the "Polish Stonewall".

This was just the latest outrage in Law and Justice's campaign against LGBT+ people. The Catholic conservative party has ruled Poland since 2015 and moved rightwards, giving confidence to even nastier forces further to its right. It's tried to further restrict a woman's right to choose, increased anti-LGBT+ rhetoric, and increasingly relied on racism against asylum seekers.

The mass arrests came hot on the heels of Andrzej Duda's re-election as Polish president the previous month.

The campaign was marked by the usual bigotry—and homophobia in particular.

In nearby Hungary, too, far right prime minister Viktor Orban pushed through a law in December 2020 that banned same-sex couples from adopting



Polish president Andrzej Duda

children. The legislation defines the family as "based on marriage and the parent-child relation". "The mother is a woman, the father a man," it specifies. And the constitution now dictates that children's upbringing must be "based on our Christian culture" and says "Hungary defends the right of children to identify with their birth gender".

It's tempting to think of the Hungarian or Polish governments' rhetoric as rooted in "backward" Christian ideas. But religious ideas around sexuality, like all ideas, are products of material circumstances. And, to fight these right wing forces, it's also important to understand how their ideas flow from the modern capitalism system and its reliance on the nuclear family.

International solidarity with LGBT+ people in Poland, Hungary and other countries with right wing governments is crucial. In Britain, for instance, activists held Polish solidarity protests in a number of towns and cities during the summer of 2020. It's vital to make links and keep building solidarity for one another's struggles.

in the home and continued the wartime changes. And as arrests soared to more than 1,000 every year, the official position was becoming increasingly untenable. The Tory government was forced to set up the Wolfenden Committee, with the intention of reinforcing the status quo.

Yet, sensationally, the committee came out for limited decriminalisation of homosexuality. Its recommendations led to the Sexual Offences Act 1967, which decriminalised sex between men in private.

The establishment figures who accepted reform didn't want sexual liberation, and the law itself was very limited and contradictory. There was a growing awareness in establishment circles that the stuffy old Toryism didn't fit with modern British capitalism. And that the system had to adapt to the wartime changes.

However, the limited reforms spurred on much more radical movements after 1968, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF).

As the mass movements ebbed, the right assaulted some of the gains. During the height of HIV and Aids in 1988, the Tories brought in Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which banned the "promotion" of homosexuality in schools. These assaults were pushed back by widespread opposition. And in 2013 another former Tory prime minister—David Cameron—brought in equal marriage and spun it as "family values". It shows how capitalism continually tries to repackage the gains for sexual liberation and reinforce the importance of the nuclear family.

Privatised reproduction and care of the next generation of labour in the nuclear family remains vital for the capitalist class. That is why the nuclear family remains a powerful ideological bastion of the capitalist system today. To win lasting liberation, we still need to tear out the roots of oppression in capitalism.

Is it all down to our genes? The myth of essentialism

MANY LGBT+ people have tended to take an essentialist view of sexual orientation and gender identity, treating these as somehow natural and "given". Sexuality and gender identity are still often presented in this oversimplified way.

This liberal view argues that we are "born this way". It's beyond an individual's control, so expression of sexuality or gender expression should be permitted without persecution. However, there are serious problems with an essentialist approach.

In the hands of fascists, for example, this view can become the justification for sterilisation and extermination.

The Nazis used both the notion that children and society need protection from gays and lesbians, and the essentialist argument that it was part of their nature. These were reasons for the arrest, imprisonment and murder of these "degenerate sub-humans".

Essentialist views ignore changing material circumstances and regard the ideas of a given period as having always been "just so". These views are idealist and ahistorical rather than materialist. Karl Marx argued that as material conditions change, so will the prevailing ideas in society.

Anthropological and archaeological evidence demonstrates considerable gender variant behaviour and non-heterosexual sexual relations have been recorded in many societies from pre-history to the present. Class society, and particularly capitalism, are not the only societies humans have ever lived in. Gender identity and sexuality and material circumstances shape one another. That means it is possible for people's self-description to change and develop over time. We change and develop throughout our lives because our sexuality and identity are expressed within given material, historical and cultural frameworks.

The oppressive material circumstances in which we are forced to live in under capitalism, however, inevitably distort and limit everyone's sexuality, gender roles and identity. This is pushed through by continued domination of the ideology of the nuclear family and a pervasive gender binary.

In a liberated world where the nuclear family was no longer the socialiser of the next generation of workers, many different gender expressions, sexualities and arrangement for living together could be more possible.

It's hard to say exactly what a socialist society would look like, but LGBT+ people as outside the "norm" would certainly not be a feature. The new norm would not have limits over sexuality and gender expression, because the economic ties to oppression would no longer exist.

Gender or sexual behaviour would matter as little as your hair colour, and the notion of homosexuality may not even exist, just as it didn't in pre-class and pre-capitalist societies. We would be liberated from gender roles that currently restrict us from freely expressing ourselves as we wish to.

Our desires are shaped by the society we are born into, but sexuality isn't binary and neither is gender. The labels we use on ourselves are driven by social expectations and we're expected to adhere to them.

And liberation doesn't come from labels. Liberated behaviour would remove the labels. For instance, there wouldn't be a rigid understanding of masculinity and femininity. We would dress freely without boundaries. Small gains that we struggle to make within capitalism can never go as far as what would be possible under socialism, because going against the "norm" still means the norm exists.

This is not true liberation. It's not good enough to merely reject the oppressive ideals of society, we have to extinguish them.

Why do we say the working class is key to liberation?

THE HISTORY of fighting for LGBT+ liberation shows that the high points of working class struggle have seen the biggest advances for all oppressed groups. That's because of the unique power workers have.

Class is a social relationship based on where you stand in relation to what Karl Marx called the "means of production". This could be a factory and the machinery, the planes, trains or buses, or a call centre and the phones. Under capitalism the ruling class is made up

of a minority of capitalists who own or control the means of production. The vast majority of people are part of the working class, who have to sell their ability to work to make a livelihood. A middle class—of small business owners, self-employed professionals and managers—sits in between.

Exploitation is at the heart of the relationship between capitalists and workers. While workers create new value, they don't get back the full value of what they make in their wages. This gap is what Marx called "surplus value" and lays the basis of capitalists' profits.

This fact also gives workers enormous potential power.

If workers refuse to work, the system grinds to a halt and profits stop flowing. So socialists don't argue that we should look to the workers because their ideas are automatically progressive. It's because they have the objective power to destroy the system that our oppression flows from.

But what of those LGBT+ people who sit at the top of society? Of course oppression cuts across class. But not all LGBT+ people experience oppression in the same way. Caitlin Jenner leads a hugely different life than working class trans women.

Not only can Jenner afford protection, she can also afford medical care and cosmetics that working class women do not have access to. LGBT+ people in the ruling class experience homophobia and transphobia and abhor it.

But their class positions means that they benefit from the system that produces and perpetuates oppression.

Marxists support the right of any oppressed group to organise together to fight their oppression. But self-organisation raises a crucial issue. We are weaker when we're divided, so the ruling class pushes oppressive ideas to keep us fighting among ourselves.

The way to overcome this is through building working class unity. Revolutionaries have to win workers who are not oppressed in this or that particular way to the fight against all forms of oppression.

The Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin argued that socialists had to be "tribunes of the oppressed", not just trade union branch secretaries.

It means we can't just fight over economic issues, such as low pay, but always take up the fight against oppression.

The Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) initiative during the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, as portrayed in the film *Pride*, remains such an important example of what can be achieved.

Workplaces bring together men and women, gay, straight and transgender people, black and white people in the common experience of exploitation. Taking on the bosses requires collective action where genuine debate can flourish and provide the foundations to create a world without discrimination.

Unity in action cuts through the ideas fed from the top of society that we must compete with one another or that the cause of your problems is the black or LGBT+ person stood next to you.

Protests, marches and strikes boost our confidence to see ourselves as the agents of change. Through struggle workers' class consciousness develops and they come to see their own power, moving from being a "class in itself" to a "class for itself".

Struggle produces the conditions for workers to see themselves as more than atomised individuals, and to take collective action. And during revolutions, this can happen on a mass scale. As Marx said, they are a chance for workers to rid themselves of "the muck of ages".



Militancy was at the heart of the first Pride marches like this one in London

Out on the streets— Prides and protest

THE FIRST Pride marches took place in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco on 28 June 1970 to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. That night of rioting outside the Stonewall Inn in New York was an explosion of resistance to police harassment and marked the birth of a new, militant movement. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed just a few weeks after the rebellion.

They described themselves as revolutionaries, stood in solidarity with other liberation struggles, and published a radical programme. Ever since, Prides have been held annually throughout the world around the month of June. Today, however, Prides have increasingly become commercialised and hijacked by corporations. Flags, rainbows, balloons, dancing, and parades have replaced placards, chanting and marching.

Trade union blocs are pushed to the back of the marches or stopped from joining in altogether. Of course we should celebrate our sexuality and the progress our campaigning has achieved. But this can encourage dangerous complacency when we are a long way from liberation. Capitalism subordinates everything to maximising profit and seeks to commodify everything, including out sexuality. Tickets for Manchester Pride in 2021 cost up to £275. Even access to the Gay Village will cost £10. The justification is that “Manchester Pride is a

charity.” Their website claims, “By purchasing a ticket, you are supporting Manchester Pride’s campaign for greater LGBTQ+ equality across the region.”

There’s even a diagram to help you decide which ticket you should buy and where your money would be best spent. The reality is this creates more inequality—many working class LGBTQ+ people cannot afford the high price tickets or any ticket at all. This means huge numbers of LGBTQ+ people will be unable to attend pride—to celebrate or protest. Parades should be open to all, but some Prides like Brighton in 2019 capped numbers. Where is the equality or inclusivity that these Prides claim they promote?

London Pride is sponsored by Tesco, Barclays and other corporations. Companies bring out the rainbow once or twice a year on their products. Restaurant chain Nando’s have handed out free flags at Prides, but with their logo printed in the middle. This is free advertising in the hope of reeling in consumers.

Changing a logo to a rainbow flag is supposed to be a sign that these commercial giants are “LGBT+ friendly” and leading the way on inclusivity. This is far from a sign of the progress we’ve made towards liberation. Corporations celebrating “diversity” is partly a response to the gains we’ve won in past decades.

But it also shows how capitalism has adopted the language of liberation and diversity, repackaged it and turned it into a commodity. While the system alienates our sexuality, we’re then told we can plug the gap and satisfy our needs simply by buying the latest product.

However, things don’t have to be this way. As the Black Lives Matter movement exploded in summer 2020, that radicalisation fed into other movements. In Britain, Black Trans Lives Matter events were set up to raise awareness of the disproportionate hate crimes suffered by black trans people.

The Trans Pride marches that now take place in a number of towns and cities in general are much younger and angrier than the established LGBTQ+ Prides. The militant London Trans+ Pride in the same summer demonstrated the power Prides could have. It demanded “trans rights now”, reform to the Gender Recognition Act and an end to the violence against transgender people. Demonstrators chanted, “Pride is a protest,” and, “Stonewall was a riot.” The loud and angry atmosphere meant it was a political protest—a huge difference from other pride events sponsored by big corporations.

This militancy shows the potential to reignite the radical tradition sparked by Stonewall and the GLF. Reclaiming Pride as a protest would mean showcasing our demands and demonstrating our solidarity with LGBTQ+ people around the world. It would show the strength we have when we come out on the streets and unite.

Why did the gay liberation movement decline?

THE FOUNDING statement of the GLF proudly stated, “We are a group of men and women formed with the realisation that complete sexual liberation cannot come about until existing social institutions are abolished ... Babylon has forced us to commit to one thing—revolution.” The GLF wasn’t a pressure group, but a militant movement fighting for change. Many in the new generation rejected traditional gender roles and pointed to the

Revolutionaries—tribunes of the people

THE WORKING class holds the key to the future because it generates all the wealth in society. Humanity's liberation depends upon the international working class taking that wealth back and running society from the bottom up to meet social need.

The Russia Revolution of 1917 was a brief glimpse, when workers' councils (soviets) took state power and began running society without any need for the old ruling class. It brought huge strides to liberation for oppressed groups.

Opposition to oppression was central to the politics of Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik party. In 1905 Lenin wrote that "revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other times are the masses of people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution".

The Bolsheviks argued that, in order to win unity inside the working class and convince oppressed people to play an active role in the struggle for socialism, revolutionaries must be "tribunes of the oppressed". That means being uncompromisingly opposed to all forms of oppression and bigoted ideas, whoever might be the target.

Forms of oppression may vary historically and culturally, but their impact is always to bolster ruling class ideology and working class division.

The Bolsheviks were actively opposed to antisemitism as well as women's oppression. They supported freedom of sexual behaviour, abortion and divorce as well as the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities.

The new revolutionary government passed a range of measures legalising



Russian women revolutionaries in 1917

divorce, enshrining women's rights and national self-determination, proscribing antisemitism and decriminalising homosexuality. Such measures were unprecedented anywhere in the world at the time.

However, the new workers' regime was isolated internationally and the Russian working class was smashed in a bloody Civil War. This undermined the workers' councils and the basis of socialism.

Meanwhile, the Bolshevik party remained in control of a vast bureaucracy, which initially tried to salvage the gains of the October Revolution. But by the 1930s this bureaucracy—with Joseph Stalin at the helm—became a new ruling class. The Soviet Union became a "state capitalist" country, which exploited workers and competed with other capitalist states.

Stalin's counter-revolution swept aside the gains of the October Revolution as the bureaucracy subordinated society to accumulating profit. Homosexuality was re-criminalised in 1933, abortion was criminalised in 1936, and women were awarded medals for motherhood.

nuclear family as a source of sexual oppression. The focus wasn't on winning equal rights with straight people over marriage or the family.

Its name was a nod to the National Liberation Fronts in Algeria and Vietnam that fought against imperial oppression. Many made common cause with the other movements against war and oppression that grew out of 1968. They talked about the need for revolution and system change. One GLF organiser, Martha Shelley, declared the movement was “marching on your citadels of repression”. Although there wasn't a settled view of where the citadels of repression lay, or what revolutionary change to get rid of them meant.

While movements did win changes, the broader revolts of 1968 failed to break through and the establishment regained the initiative. Unfortunately in the US and other parts of the world, the rise of the mass movements of 1968 did not coincide with an upsurge of working class struggle. The working class has a unique position within capitalist society—as the source of bosses' profit—which means it has the power to shut down the system.

When movements don't break through and go into decline, divisions often come to the fore. This failure led to fragmentation and a retreat from liberation into pressure group politics. In its early days the GLF included transgender people and their aspirations. Very quickly, however, they were seen as an impediment to winning influence in local and national government. The split was essentially between the “safe” LGBT+ activists and those deemed unrealistic or too radical, with aspirations that the “safe gays” deemed unachievable. How and why did this marginalisation happen?

One example of these splits was the contrast between the 1972 and 1973 Prides in San Francisco. The city's first Pride in 1972 celebrated the Compton Café Riot of transgender people demanding their rights and welcomed drag. But it ended in fighting between the organisers and a lesbian separatist group. By 1973 there were two Prides, one of which banned transgender people and drag.

The notion of “homonormativity”—that LGBT+ people's goal should be acceptance and accommodation within capitalist society—began to dominate among activists. The fight for LGBT+ liberation and the transformation of society that many of the early activists aspired to had become anathema. The most radical gays and transgender people, such as US transgender activist Sylvia Rivera, were becoming marginalised.

Huge upsurges of working class struggle did come later on in the early 1970s, in Britain in particular. However, as a crisis of profitability return to the capitalism, the ruling class went on the offensive against working class people's living standards. It was a harbinger of neoliberalism so enthusiastically adopted by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan from the late 1970s.

The leaderships of social democratic parties such as Labour—which seek reforms within capitalism—and the the trade union leaderships agreed that capitalism had to be nursed back to health in some way. These union officials would rather make poor deals with the bosses and keep their roles as negotiators within capitalism than directly challenge attacks.

As the retreat from class struggle accelerated in the 1970s the dominant view among most gay men and lesbians became a reformist and assimilationist one, excluding the more radical and socialist elements. There were parallel moves among women's movement activists, leading to notions of radical separatists. And, in some cases, a complete rejection of working with men—and transgender women—accompanied by rejection of involvement in male-dominated unions and class struggle.

Reformist and revolutionary strategies for LGBT+ liberation are not two separate paths

Picture: Guy Smallman



London Trans+ Pride in 2020 showed the potential to bring back radical politics

leading to the same goal. In reality the reformist path—the belief that lobbying, playing the electoral game and changing the law are the only “realistic” approaches—can never achieve liberation.

The political and ideological retreats of the 1970s were also expressed in postmodernism, patriarchy theory, identity politics and, later, Queer Theory. These all served as justifications for these retreats. These have been at best indifferent and at worst hostile to Marxism and active involvement in class struggle. This was a tragedy, given the strong links that had existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries between socialist organisations and individuals and the first homosexual rights movements. Today’s activists need to rediscover those early links.

The retreat from class

MANY PEOPLE who support the fight against LGBT+ oppression share a political worldview that is based on some form of identity theory rather than Marxism’s class-based explanations. Rather than history and society being understood through “grand narratives” such as class and class struggle, it focuses on individual characteristics and individual differences. Postmodern theorists like Jacques Derrida, Jean-Michel Lyotard and Michel Foucault in the 1970s and 80s provided the ideological justification for the retreat

from class. These “post-structuralists” rejected Marxism and argued that power in modern “post-industrial” societies was not ordered according to class position but was diffuse and dispersed. Reality was not objective but subjective and power was multiple and fragmented rather than rooted in class position.

Struggle ceased to be thought of in terms of collective class struggle, but became individualised and based around resistance to particular oppressions. Fighting back frequently became limited to acts of resistance and subversion around one’s own identity, or challenging one’s own or others’ “privileges”.

The idea that an oppressed person’s identity characteristics supersede class divisions and should be struggled against independently from other people’s “identities” has had a corrosive impact on the potential for common struggle. It goes against the idea that liberation can only be achieved collectively in the class struggle.

This is as true for LGBT+ oppression as for other forms of oppression in capitalism. A series of identity theory-based approaches, such as Queer Theory and privilege theory, have emerged over the past forty years or so and give voice to these retreats from class.

Identity theories

QUEER THEORY and queer politics, derived from the writings of Michel Foucault and later, Judith Butler, emerged as quite a contradictory approach from the 1970s. It became popular, particularly in academia, in the 1980s.

On the one hand it rejects the rise of the comfortable individualism of a minority of relatively affluent LGBT+ people, the predominance of the commercialised Pink Pound, and the notion of the “safe gay”. On the other hand, it continues to embody the retreat from class politics and Marxism that we have just described.

In some respects socialists and queer theorists share a common starting point. Both reject the de-politicisation and commercialisation of the gay movement, both emphasise the way that society shapes our experience of sex and gender, and both call for a return to activism, protest and radicalism.

Queer Theory argues that seeking to “queer” mainstream approaches to any field of study, not just sexuality or gender, contributes a subversive quality which can challenge prevailing power relations.

Nevertheless, at heart Queer Theory represents a break from Marxism. Above all, it rejects the idea that the working class is the agent of revolutionary change. That rejection is fatal to any notion that Queer Theory can constitute a genuine theory of liberation for LGBT+ people. Intersectionality’s basic claim is that oppressed people may have multiple intersecting vectors of oppression—such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and so on. And that the experience of marginalised people needs to be understood as being based on multiple identities that contribute to their systematic social inequality.

In essence, a person’s “intersectional experience” will be greater than the sum of the parts, the specific forms of oppression that they experience. Like Queer Theory, intersectionality has contradictory aspects. It’s recognition that people may experience multiple oppressions, and in exploring how these may impact one another, can be valuable to counteract the unfortunate reality that there is no automatic solidarity between oppressed groups. Women

Nazi Germany—a warning from history

NO LGBT+ person can afford to be complacent about the rights that have been won so far. On the contrary, history tells us that what can be won at one time can be swept away in a different period. The most graphic example is Germany.

The mass migration of workers to German cities from the countryside in the 19th century had led to the emergence of a gay subculture centred on clubs and bars. In Berlin alone by 1914 there were around 40 gay bars. By the 1920s there were around 100.

By the early 20th century the German Social Democratic Party was a mass working class organisation.

It included Magnus Hirschfeld, a doctor and founder of the first homosexual rights organisation in the world, which aimed to overturn the anti-homosexual Paragraph 175 passed in 1871. Hirschfeld's view of homosexuality—that gays and lesbians were a kind of “third sex”—was typical for the time. But it was hardly progressive and it proved to be an ideological gift to the viciously homophobic Nazis.

Eduard Bernstein, a leading member of the German Social Democratic Party, argued that socialist parties should discuss homosexuality and take sexual politics seriously. Another leading member, August Bebel, had raised homosexual reform in the German parliament in 1898.

The imperialist butchery in the First World War and the example of the Russian Revolution radicalised millions of German soldiers and workers and the German Revolution broke out in late 1918. The Kaiser (king) was forced to flee and a republic was set up. Hirschfeld himself and many gay organisations



Nazis are again a threat

played an active role in the revolution. And later he founded an Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. His institute carried out some of the world's first sex affirmation surgeries.

But the relative toleration of LGBT+ people during the Weimar Republic of the 1920s was blown apart by the victory of the Nazi Party in 1933. It marched to power over a divided left and working class that could have stopped it.

The Nazis strengthened Paragraph 175. Tens of thousands of LGBT+ people were arrested in the 1930s and 1940s and thrown into prisons and concentration camps.

When gay men were sent to the concentration camps their uniforms carried an “A” (for the German word for “ass-fucker”). This was later changed to a pink triangle. Tens of thousands were killed, and the pink triangle was later adopted by the gay movement as a symbol of solidarity and defiance.

Heinz Heger's book, *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (Gay Men's Press, London, 1980), is a must-read.

can be racist, LGBT+ people can be Islamophobic, black people can be sexist. And the way black women experience sexism will be shaped by racism and different to the way white women experience it. Many of today's younger activists who readily see the links between one form of oppression and another may describe themselves as intersectional in this "soft" sense. This is a positive starting point from which to organise collectively.

The negative aspects flow from accepting intersectionality theory as an explanation of the roots of oppression. Socialists argue that intersectionality does little more than name the reality that many oppressed people are multiply oppressed. On how to resist this, the approach provides little other than saying we should seek greater self-awareness to "increase self-value" and achieve "a stable self-definition".

Privilege Theory, which emerged in the late 1980s, has similar roots. It argues that a range of power advantages are often unconsciously inherent in the very fact that someone is white, or heterosexual, or cisgender, or male.

Those who have one or other such privilege ought to work towards becoming self-aware—"check their privilege". Or they need to have their privilege pointed out to them so they can become self-aware and use this self-awareness to combat inequality in power relations. Of course, people who don't suffer from a particular oppression should be aware of its effects on those who do—all the better to oppose it. Those who reinforce oppression, and the wealthy few who benefit from a system that promotes it, must be called to account. But it is not a privilege for a cisgender or straight person not to get attacked for being trans or gay. Rather, it should be a right, just like anyone else, for a cisgender or gay person not to be subject to such violence and discrimination.

Privilege theory can lead to some very pessimistic and unhelpful conclusions. For example, it is not helpful or progressive to insist that the best cisgender or straight supporters of LGBT+ rights can do is be "allies" of LGBT+ people.

This, in practice, denies that fighting homophobia or transphobia is actually in the interests of ordinary straight and cisgender people. Marxists argue that cisgender and straight people fighting together with LGBT+ people against homophobia or transphobia will help the liberation of all working class people regardless of their particular oppressions.

We don't want the crumbs, we want the bakery!

A SOCIETY that merely tolerates LGBT+ people is not enough. We need liberation—and we can't have that under capitalism. Capitalism is a system that has only existed for a fraction of humanity's history.

The desire for a better world and a better way of living explains why so many people around the world protest against corrupt governments or when their rights are challenged. People respond whenever there is hope and the possibility of resistance. The pro-abortion protests in Poland towards the end of 2020 also helped to put the fight for LGBT+ rights out in the streets. Reforms are important and winning them increases our confidence. The Polish-German revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg said that revolutionaries must fight the hardest for reforms, because this is where workers realise their power. But to win lasting

change and liberation, we have to uproot the economic and political system that perpetuates various forms of oppression.

But just winning rights under capitalism is not enough. Class society gives rise to oppression and distorts sexuality. In capitalism our sexuality is alienated from us. We are social creatures, but our relationships and the way we view ourselves have become commodities. And we're told that all our needs can be met by buying the latest products.

Although no one is entirely sure, the global "Pink Economy" is estimated to be worth a huge \$4.6 trillion. This plays an enormous role in promoting a narrow set of ideas and values geared towards us spending money. This framework promotes an image of what capitalism wants us to be like. The heteronormative ideal of a gay man is a muscular and hyper-sexualised body, career success and a specific purchasing power. This differentiates between those bodies and lifestyles that are seen as desirable and those that aren't. And LGBT+ people can get married and have children to fit the ideals of class society's nuclear family. Anyone who sits outside this narrative is going against the societal norms that are created for us.

There will always be attempts to claw back the gains we've made. The Tory government is driving measures through to make working class people pay for the coronavirus crisis. Tory policies of austerity and cuts are hitting LGBT+ people—such as funding for anti-LGBT+ bullying programmes. And they have gone back on their promises to reform the Gender Recognition Act. We're fighting for rights within a system that has no interest in granting them unless it's beneficial for the smooth operation of profit-making. Not only does capitalism make money by defining what LGBT+ people should be like, but the continued exploitation of the working class also requires oppression to keep us divided. Achieving better rights within the system is important—legal and social equality, for example, the right of people to self-identify, the right to bodily autonomy—but our liberation has to be the goal we're fighting for.

How do we win liberation?

LGBT+ LIBERATION can only be accomplished by convincing both LGBT+ and straight people, by word and deed, that our fundamental interests lie in promoting united struggle against homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and all oppressions, and promoting resistance to our exploitation as workers.

When Karl Marx wrote 150 years ago that capitalism creates its own gravediggers, he was referring to the working class. He realised that, as workers, if we are sufficiently well organised and confident, we have the power to oust the tiny class of capitalists. And by getting rid of capitalism, we could institute a new, socialist order will make possible the liberation of humanity as a whole from exploitation and oppression.

The crises of coronavirus, climate chaos economic slump and never-ending wars show how capitalism isn't delivering for millions of people—and that mainstream politicians have no answers. As crisis grows, the ruling class will scapegoat oppressed groups as a way of diverting anger away from their responsibility for having created the mess in the first place.

Yet we've also seen inspiring mass movements and uprisings to oppose the oppression and capitalist crisis. Supporting and deepening those movements—and linking them to workers' power—gives us a chance to uproot the whole capitalist system and win liberation.

Useful organisations and contact points

All Out International campaigning organisation for LGBT+ equality equalityallout.org

Gender Identity Research and Education Society for trans information and resources gires.org.uk

Gendered Intelligence Charity specialising in helping and supporting young trans and non-binary people genderedintelligence.co.uk

IMAAN LGBTQ Muslim support charity www.imaan.org.uk

International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association International non-governmental umbrella group for over 600 LGBT+ organisations in Europe and Central Asia campaigning for political, legal and social change ilga-europe.org

Just Like Us Anti bullying charity www.justlikeus.org.uk

LGBT History Month lgbthistory.org.uk

Mermaids Family and individual support charity for gender diverse teenagers and young people mermaidsuk.org.uk

Pride in Education Educational resources and networking for educators educateandcelebrate.org/prideineducation

Schools Out LGBT+ educational resources schools-out.org.uk

Stand Up To LGBTQ Hate Crime A political coalition of LGBT+ Groups and their Allies fighting rising levels of anti-LGBT+ hate incidents in Britain, and forging international solidarity against bigotry facebook.com/standuptolgbtqhatecrime

Stonewall National advocacy organisation, also keeps a directory of local support groups stonewall.org.uk

Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline 0300 330 0630 switchboard.lgbt

Trades Union Congress and many individual trade unions have LGBT+ equality units, policies and reps www.tuc.org

Background material

Films

- Pride (directed by Matthew Warchus, written by Stephen Beresford, 2014)
Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton Cafeteria (directed by Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman, 2005)
Stonewall Uprising (American Experience, 2010)

Books and articles

- Martin Duberman, Stonewall (Penguin Books, 1993)
J D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity", in Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University (Routledge, 1992)
Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Penguin, 2010)
Leslie Feinberg, Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodham (Beacon Press, 1997).
Laura Miles, "Transgender Oppression and Resistance", in International Socialism 141 (2014)
Sherry Wolf, Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics, and Theory of LGBT Liberation (Haymarket Books, 2009)
Esme Choonara, Yuri Prasad, Ken Olende and Weyman Bennett, Does privilege explain racism? Contemporary debates in anti-racism, Bookmarks 2020.
Nicola Field, Over the rainbow: Money, class and homophobia, 2nd edition, (Dog Horn Publishing, 2016)
Laura Miles, Transgender Resistance: Socialism and the fight for transgender liberation, (Bookmarks, 2020)
Laura Miles, Pat Clinton, TKS and Sally Campbell, The fight for trans liberation, Socialist review pamphlet 2018
Sheila McGregor, Social reproduction theory, Back to (which) Marx? International Socialism Journal, Issue 160, October 2018.
Sue Caldwell, Marxism, feminism and transgender politics, International Socialism Journal, Issue 157, December 2017

From the growth of the far right to rising transphobia, LGBT+ rights are being undermined across the world.

In Britain, too, many hard-won legal rights no longer feel secure. To fight back we need to reclaim the LGBT+ movement's radical history of resistance—and arm ourselves with a theoretical understanding about why oppression exists.

LGBT+ people have serious questions about how to win the liberation we crave from the alienation and oppression we face. This pamphlet, now substantially revised and updated in a second edition, seeks to offer answers to these crucial questions.

Authors Laura Miles, Isabel Ringrose and Tomáš Tengely-Evans offer a Marxist explanation of the roots of homophobia and transphobia, argue we need to build united opposition to the attacks on LGBT+ people, and ask how we can fight for genuine liberation.



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