

Rights or liberation?

Trans Liberation is the right to be yourself. But this needs to be beyond the simple question of legal rights, which can be taken away by the state as readily as they can be given.

If we can make common cause with all of the oppressed, then trans liberation means liberation for all people. From landlords, bosses and borders, not just homophobia and misogyny.

But for many of us liberation isn't part of our vocabulary, it's survival, living through the trans moral panic that is progressively getting worse. For some of us our politics are location-based, for example around a workplace, trying to protect and defend spaces from an influx of transphobia.

Trans liberation means asking difficult questions. Mass movements, solidarity movements, mean working with the larger British public. And that's scary because a chunk of the public is hostile. But just talking about identity in itself isn't enough - we need something bigger. We have to engage with the questions of who we deal with and who we work with in the politics of solidarity.

A history of solidarity

We need to address issues that aren't just affecting trans and non-binary people. The seeds are in there, we're talking about Marsha P Johnson & Silvia Rivierra's work in the 60s and the 70s: their whole understanding of liberation was against a racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, capitalist government.

We need to look for coalitions and there's a long history.

In the early 19th century the film 'Birth of a nation' was boosting the membership of the KKK. The film was a powerful tool for intimidating black and brown people in the US, but they organised successful protests in coalition with Catholics and Jews, who were also hated by the KKK. If you look at the history of these movements, they find mutuality.

Another good example is the Black Panthers in the 1960s. They went to the Appalachians, a white working class fairly racist area, and worked with them. That wouldn't have been easy. It's about difficult conversations, different coalitions. At the end, in terms of solidarity politics, this white group got rid of the Confederate flag as their symbol.

The need for social justice

There are links to when we look at the medical and social models of disability. Society is structured under capitalism to make people disabled. If we organised things properly and made things truly accessible then much disability vanishes. Links to RMT - closure of ticket offices - an example of how society excludes people, solely because of the desire to save money.

Practices from disability justice organising that we take for granted: mutual aid, collective care. We have power if we have deeper conversations about the nuances of intersectionality between the trans community and chronic illness - particularly the intersections around our healthcare.

In student organising, a lot of folks have noticed campus security has got a lot more aggressive recently. They're calling the cops on student protestors and student organisers. Today, a student protesting for Palestinian liberation got taken in. What do we do in the face of mounting violence from an institution we're a part of, with them weaponizing the state against us?

How do we connect?

But in the present how do we connect? There is a possibility of solidarity because many potentially hostile people have radical positions on things like nationalising utilities and funding for the NHS. So the class solidarity is potentially there. But how do we do it? How do we cross bridges towards people who might ordinarily frighten us? What language or method do we have of bringing together class solidarity so it works? So what are the boundaries?

For example building the commonality. 'Trans misogyny is misogyny' is a powerful point. We are all involved in fighting misogyny. We all have this common struggle in fighting this form of gendered oppression, because gender is a key element of all forms of oppression and the state continues to need gender in order to function.

It's about where you organise, take the bar trade for example. There's lots of lads in the bar industry: homophobia is something we have to deal with when we're organising. When you need someone on your side, there's an instinct if they say something problematic to ditch them - but in the long-run we need them to work with us. Trying to reach a connection, for instance, through another shared interest or identity, can be a powerful way of getting through. The majority of folks who have some anti-trans view, it will be something they pick up but they've never actually talked to a trans person. Reaching out to folk as if they're normal folk, when you talk to them you find most people want to be nice. Even if they have some objectionable views, if you can find a way around that you can often build some coalition.

It can be about the solidarity of the picket line. Going along to the RMT picket lines in Edinburgh with Unite pride flags. Being consistent, turning up regularly. Not just parachuting in. Don't be dishonest about where you're coming from, but focus on their priorities. They will come to see you as a human being. One day when it was freezing cold, we were just finishing up and the RMT reps gave us hats. Now worn with pride.

We can be trade union committee members, we can go to union conferences. We can pass lots of great resolutions and then nothing happens. Get queer people to come and speak to your networks, get the message to the grassroots.

There's also the hostile environment and this is really important at the moment, where refugee and migrant rights are intersecting with the queer community. There's a question around the forms of bureaucracy instituted through this policy e.g. passport checks at the start of working in any public institution; trying to get housing; trying to access healthcare. These are all concrete things that affect our everyday lives. The whole question about GRA reform is trying to make our lives a bit easier around documents. But surely the actual problem is having to show your papers all the time. The burden of proof placed on people the hostile environment is challenging is intense, and this is particularly extreme around trans and non binary refugees. Invasive questions about public life, having to prove sexuality through use of photographs and talking about sex life. Private things that no one should have to disclose, let alone to the Home Office.

Keeping up our strength

Allies are vital. Cis women are attending protests because they are aware of the intersections between fascists and transphobes. One woman describes how they got doxxed as a trans woman on Twitter, despite being cis, after standing in solidarity with trans women. They are now looking to set up 'mams for trans' who go on the frontline and take the grief, they also bring cakes and pies!

Regarding protest, the only way to protest ourselves is through strength of numbers. We had loads of folks turn out today at the pro-Palestinian protest, and the person who was arrested got de-arrested.

Hold onto knowledge gained and share it. It's easy to forget our history, even our more recent history. One issue in the union is that often there is a turnover in any liberationist and anti-capitalist movement. People come along, get very engaged, then something changes in their life and they leave, taking all the experience they have with them. We need older activists, folk with experience, and they need to pass that experience on.

It helps to have a supportive group of folks around you, and folk you can turn to. With groups like RTiE, if someone needs a bit of time out, they can take a bit of time out. There should be no pressure to do more, and always remember to thank your allies for everything they do.

Shift the weight of survival into forms of thriving. Things like mutual aid. Gender affirmation gives us more breathing, thinking space. How do we do that? Love, care, everyday practices of support and who we prioritise.

Chosen family

Parents have a right, to different degrees around the world, to dominate the views and values of their young people. In China, for instance, a major worry of young people is that parents will send them off to internet addiction treatment centres - fear of institutionalisation, torture, abuse for trans people. How to remove that fear? Reduce the power of parents over young people. It's not just for trans people. They should not have the right to torture people for any reason.

Emancipation of young folks is starting to happen in Edinburgh. Recently started High School students union, organising for better access to IT and internet. As adults, we have a responsibility to have a pedagogy that's less based on domination and reproducing social domination, and more based on learning alongside our children and treating them with dignity as human beings.

Trans and non-binary people are resilient. As someone out as a trans teenager, what's noticeable at the moment is a lack of trans youth voices in conversations about trans young people. It suggests the media don't value trans young people's voices. Now think about parents who have learned loads from their trans kids, as well as gaining the strength to come out as trans themselves. And in England, attempts to restrict any trans affirmative action in schools could really backfire on trans parents as well.

Conclusions

Liberation is about practices. It's about what we do in our lives. So where do we make liberation in our lives? Where are our struggles located? Workplaces, institutional contexts, are maybe the most visible. Then there's political elements in everyday lives, e.g. everyday transphobia, and how we understand those politically. And then the social level of who's around us, who's in the room today.

We've covered multiple forms of division, and divide and rule is the oldest tactic in the book.

But If we can make common cause with all of the oppressed, then trans liberation means liberation for all people. Not just from homophobia and misogyny, but from landlords, bosses and borders.