

What is trans liberation?

L: "The right to be myself.."Trans rights, legal rights such as GRR, are something that can taken away as well as given. Importance of looking beyond rights to think about what real liberation means. Address issues that aren't just affecting trans non-binary people: for instance, smashing patriarchy,.

N: "It's about total liberation for everyone": already an intersectional form of liberation. Thinking through how trans liberation is rooted in history of anti-colonial histories. Palestinian liberation is about trans liberation - this is about liberation from forms of ongoing colonial oppression and violence.

In terms of rights, sure we all want trans right. But what are we actually asking for and what are its implications? How far will legal gender recognition take us? Does it protect us from state violence, incarceration etc? Not convinced that the state is going to liberate us - if it does, only the most privileged of us. Negotiating with the state for rights can have strategic uses but how do rights seriously, materially affect us?

T: When we get equality with cisgender people, what's next? Can cisgender people be said to be liberated when we are wage slaves, pay most of our money into our homes. Liberation is looking beyond a focus at an individual groups rights. If we do that, we're missing out on the bigger picture. With the GRA reforms, we're fighting for the government to have a special list of trans people. "Personally I don't want to go for a GRC, because I don't want to be on a government list." And it's unlikely that homeless trans people, for example, would be able to access any of the benefits associated with that.

G: Before this evening, I didn't know what trans liberation might mean. Liberation wasn't part of my vocabulary: it was survival. Living through the trans moral panic, it's progressively getting worse. My politics is location-based around my university workplace, trying to protect and defend spaces from an influx of transphobia. It's not inspiring.

Trans liberation means asking difficult questions. Mass movements, solidarity movements, mean working with the larger British public. And that's scary because 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 a politics of solidarity.

What is the history of trans liberation?

M: joining threads of trans liberation, so we can talk about it alongside people being bombed in Gaza, people being evicted from their homes

N: Where does the language or discourse of liberation come from? Historically, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movements. The language of the 'gay liberation front' is lifted directly from the Vietnamese liberation front during the US war in Vietnam. 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 is against a racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, capitalist government. We can always go back to the strategies and ideas emerging from previous moments in history.

Gender is a key element of all of these forms of oppression. The state continues to need gender in order to function. And we can trace that back to the project of the British Empire and rules of expression that were exported across the work.

Leslie Feinberg was working within often very gendered, often very queer and trans workplaces, trying to fight union oppression. Trans liberation has always been about disability justice, it's always been about abolition. We need to think about how we might reproduce these forms of oppression in our own context.

T: It's easy to forget that 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. It's very important to hold onto that knowledge and to share it down. We need older activists, folk with experience, and they need to pass that experience on.

M: Those traditions, the knowledge that should get passed down generation by generation - how do we make sure we keep those links alive? How do we venerate that knowledge?

T: In the union, one thing we do to address this is monthly meet-ups where we invite activists from other unions who have been going for a long time, together with folks who are relatively new to all of this. Even something as simple as that means that every time you come away learning something - personal histories, organising techniques. For instance, showing up, being from an organisation, but also trying very hard to build social bonds.

L: People talk a lot about the Tories picking on trans and non-binary people, using them as a political football. The capitalist class is worried that so many young people identify as queer in some way. It's a massive threat to the reproduction of labour when the patriarchal heteronormative family set up is disrupted. When people set up alternative families, get away from this capitalist set-up, back to broader social family set-ups, it's a problem.

G: There was an anti-trans film in Edinburgh in April and December. Doing research about other public screenings, for instance very racist films boosting the membership of the KKK. It was a powerful tool for intimidating black and brown people in the US. Their most successful protests were in coalition with Catholics and Jews, who were also hated. If you look at the history of these movements, they find mutuality.

Another good example is the Black Panthers in the 1960s. A socialist black liberation 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.

Example of Contrapoints talking about Trans Liberation Now in 2021. For her, she was fed up of the "Trans women are women" slogan. It turns equality battles into battles of validation. And the discussion is derailed into "What is a woman" rather than "We need equality". Shon Faye also talks about this liberation politics. These new cycles show there is a dissatisfaction with some of the strategies of validation politics that trans people have been sucked into. We have reached the point where we need not just new slogans, but new forms of coalition or politics. The status quo hasn't really been working.

T: A fan of coalition organising. 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.

N: Building the commonality. The "Trans women are women" slogan is boring. But "Trans misogyny is misogyny" is a much more powerful point. We are all involved in fighting misogyny. We all have this common struggle in fighting this form of gendered oppression.

M: Echo the idea of meeting people where they are, as an important place for beginning dialogue - where we can. If you can have a conversation that gets people in the room, that's a start.

How does the project of trans liberation intersect with other struggles?

G: How do we connect? For example people with stereotypical lower working/middle class attitudes. Possible of solidarity because they also have potentially radical positions on things like nationalising utilities, 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 me? What language or method do we have of bringing together class solidarity so it works? Personal experience of being confronted by transphobic abuse. There are limits to solidarity. Some people are obsessively hateful. So what are the boundaries? What brings us together is dissatisfaction and despair about how the country is at the moment.

L: Leslie is wandering around with an RMT hat. Not a member of the RMT. Going along to their picket lines with GRaham. Take Unite pride flags along. One day when it was freezing cold, finishing up and RMT reps gave them each a hat. 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 come to see you as a human being.

N: Hostile environment. 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.

So we can trace back: we all have a shared interest here. 20 years ago the idea of having identity cards that the state would check was considered ludicrous. And now everywhere you go, someone can report you.

T: As a union rep, when workers are dealing with transphobic abuse, we use a 'one two' punch technique. Alongside Health and Safety, the Equality Act is key. It kicks in before two years, unlike most employment law. Transphobic abuse is often on account of gender reassignment and sex (aka gender). Simultaneously they'd use a similar technique for a cis woman. Whether it's in the workplace or society, the people in power and doing oppression are the same people. If we're building power to bring about trans liberation, that power can be used to bring about the liberation of other people.

What can we do right now to advance trans liberation?

M: Really important at the moment, where refugee and migrant rights are intersecting with the queer community. The idea that people can be separated is ludicrous, but done deliberately by people who hold that power.

L: Member of Unite Scotland LGBT+ committee, able to go to union conferences. They pass lots of great resolutions and then nothing happens. Bureaucracy gets in the way and nobody notices. Get people queer people to come and speak to your other networks.

N: 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 rules is the oldest tactic in the book. So how do we challenge that dynamic of separation in our everyday lives, our social lives, our institutional contexts? What can we learn from our friends? Edinburgh has been really bad at dealing with racism in our queer and trans communities. We are failing - and it's a really basic form of separation in our everyday lives. These are things where that's simple practices that we can use to undo.

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.

T: The internet is not the whole world, but it can seem like it's everything and the only thing you can do is interact on its terms. But it is highly demanding, and you get into a cycle of bad news, shared with mates because commiserating is cathartic. It builds up: you burn out and stop caring or you do something really stupid. One of the best ways of getting out of that is doing stuff in person: music, food, song, organising a union. Because when you see something small where you are are powerful.

G: Get off Twitter. Join a union. You see little things: breakthroughs. Recently UCU won the pensions fight. Being part of a mass movement, having successes is powerful. It's about seeing past the media spin and seeing people for who they really are.

Q&A

Keep talking to each other. Had a conversation with Tilly that changed where she was going. Attended a protest because she's aware of the intersections between fascists and transphobes. Got doxxed as a trans woman on Twitter, despite being cis. Ended up with 'mums for trans' who go on the frontline and take the grief. Looking to recruit mums: Linda Perry on Twitter. Bring cakes and pies.

Mingjue: Trans liberation as liberation from parents. Parents have a right, to different degrees around the world, to dominate the views and values of their young people. In China, 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.

T: 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.

N: 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. And in England, attempts to restrict any trans affirmative action in schools, could really backfire on trans parents as well.

In student organising, a lot of folks have noticed campus security have 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, and them weaponising the state against us?

There's a lot of talk about educating others and bring others in to create broader liberation movements. What do you do when you're emotionally burnt out from educating people? When opening up to folks who might be hostile is too taxing, too draining.

T: Don't think in terms of 'burnt out', but 'can I be bothered'. It helps to have a supportive group of folks around you, and folk you can turn to. Although the conversations can be exhausting, you get better at it. Sometimes you can say the very basics and just bluster past. But sometimes asking them questions about themselves, getting to know them, helps quite a lot. A lot of the tiring thing about having the trans conversation is it gets a bit boring. But if someone's being annoying, there's nothing wrong about deflecting. Doing it on your own terms can help.

L: With RTiE, if someone needs a bit of time out, they can take a bit of time out. There's no pressure to do more. Regarding protest, the only way to protest ourselves is through strength of numbers. We had loads of folks turn out today, and the person who was arrested got de-arrested.

N: Intersectional perspective: who gets affected by increased security on campus? POC, femmes, queers... And sharing information - not just on the internet - making sure everybody knows what's going on.

Connected struggles of disability and trans rights.

L: 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 nobody would be disabled. Links to RMT - closure of ticket offices - an example of how society excludes people, solely because of the desire to save money.

N: 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.