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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The Platypus Review is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left-not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The Platypus Review hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750-4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: review_editor@platypus1917.org. All submissions should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style.

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The Platypus Review

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON

WOMEN: THE LONGEST **REVOLUTION?**

Named for Juliet Mitchell's 1966 essay, this panel series explores the long history of the struggle for women's liberation from the vantage point of the Left today. In the essay, Mitchell critiques bourgeois feminist demands such as the right to work and equal pay to posit the need instead for equal work. She calls for a politics capable of taking on the fundamental transformation of society and more immediate demands "in a single critique of the whole of women's situation." Therefore we ask: What is the relationship between the struggle for social emancipation and the particular tasks of feminism. How have Leftists imagined this relationship historically? What do we make of it today?

While the "woman question" has played an important role in the history of the Left, its inclusion in current Leftist politics does not reflect a greater understanding of what the struggle for women's liberation might mean politically. How exactly is it "the longest revolution?" When did it begin? If the crisis of bourgeois society in the industrial revolution posed the need for women's freedom as inseparable from the project of human emancipation, then what do we make of the later separation of the feminist movement from the workers' movement for socialism? What do the successes of feminism tell us when considered in relation to the failure of the proletarian struggle to deepen/realize the task of human freedom?

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gave rise to the subjection of women, is able in a of those forces, which at some point in the past disappearance of these factors, only the evolution a secondary factor in this process. Only the complete subordination of women; natural qualities have been day. Specific economic factors were behind the separate from the general social question of our the existence of a special woman question, The followers of historical materialism reject

:maimofen bna mainimef $\Omega uestion"$ in 1909. It speaks to the question of bourgeois a brilliant piece called "The Social Basis of the Woman Alexandra Kollontai, a Russian revolutionary, wrote

we know men's is a specific sort of violence that's done know their names or most of their stories the way that the struggle for human liberation. The fact that we don't been women uncompromising in their commitment to femme folks. It's just patent fact. There have always been incapable of anything without women and without Left as it stands today and as it has stood would have own liberation as a question, so I hope that we can all central question—although it is funny to think of my encouraging discussion and debate around such a Brit Schulte: I'm humbled to be in a space that's

emancipation of all humanity. the emancipation of women, which also includes the then can we truly conceive of a socialist society and strength we will all gain from their empowerment, own organizations we welcome the understanding and tor example, black working-class women create their our ideal world). If instead of feeling threatened when, hasic humanity that unites us (or should unite us in hand that we can see our sameness on the other: the when we recognize and respect differences on one etc. experiences. Far from promoting disunity, it is only women who embody different racial, national, sexual, organizational reality independent of men, so too do list could continue). Just as women need our own age, education, class, or able-bodiedness land the others, be it racial, ethnic, religious, national, sexual, ways that women are oppressed and in fact oppress movements, differences that result from the various between women and in women's organizations and

Emma Sulkowicz carries her mattress during her graduation. Photo: Michael Appleton/New York Times



Now for something more expressly political: The and I think that they are valid. everyday experiences inform my politics of resistance to these comments and to this conversation. These way as I bring class analysis and a feminist framework by. I think it's important to color my laboring reality this food stamps and assistance. I routinely use theft to get than I have even when they were unemployed and on identifying partners have always made more money that I'm sure most of you are familiar with. My malepursue academic interests, projects, and studies organizing, or the costly free labor that's needed to the uncompensated labor of community and campus for years in a home with a partner who was a man, or labor that women perform and that I've performed agency. This obviously doesn't include all of the unpaid my time is spent selling my labor-power with little to no straight job (and without union representation), most of manage other debts and bills, who is underpaid at her way to pay rent, who is dependent on student loans to as a queer woman, who is involved with sex work as a begin in that vein. Speaking as someone who identifies much so) that the personal is political and I want to agree in this space that it's a declarative. I do think (very

and fissures that have always existed among and emancipate women we need to recognize the conflicts "Woman," but such an entity does not exist. In order to So far I have spoken as if there is something called

solidarity to fight against this. consequently, have the material resources and the how, why, and by whom we are being oppressed, and ensure that we recognize, express, and obtain when, also need organizations and institutions of our own to and, indeed, in some reformist organizations, but we Women need to lead and participate in all revolutionary and dreams and to concretize our program for liberation. spaces from which to articulate our demands, desires, organizations. We need independent organizations and fronts, in mixed-gender and in autonomous women's emancipation of women, women need to work on many only by building socialism. In order to obtain the women to think that we will achieve women's liberation to do this. However, it would be a huge mistake for socialism. Women need to work together with men Women alone will not end capitalism or build Leaning in," I think we need to lean out.

women more into the capitalist system. Instead of some women, and double-edged, since they have sucked

are both positive, since they have made life better for Rather, the advances women make in a capitalist society co-opt women into capitalism. That would be ridiculous. example, is just the result of some netarious scheme to that is not to say that women's ability to be attorneys, for a world once defined and solely inhabited by men. But to incorporate smart, creative, and energetic women into capitalism is to generate profits, and one way to do so is security, a livable wage, and respect. The goal of unhealthy, non-union jobs where they lack healthcare, (like being a professor), but millions of women work in upper class women have better paid and interesting jobs are burdened with debt. Yes, many middle class and college earning advanced degrees, but most students goes down, another goes up. So, yes, women are now in advances of women to an air mattress: If one portion or undermined capitalism as a system. I liken the However, these achievements have in no way weakened concessions from the capitalist society we live in. women and supportive men have wrested some from them? They mean that the power of organized mean? How widespread are they? Who has benefitted societies around the world. But what do these gains women's movement has made for women in capitalist societies. We must acknowledge the gains that the experiences have changed for women in bourgeois It is undeniable that conditions, attitudes, and

guarantees the emancipation of women. is that no economic or social system automatically to construct socialism, one thing we can say for sure attempted (with greater or lesser degrees of success) capitalism and has persisted in societies that have tor liberation. Because women's oppression predates defined and practiced as the human quest and need working class women. Socialism is, or should be, achieve the emancipation of any women, including across classes and in multiple situations, we will not across the board, as mothers, as wives, as workers, Unless we fight against the devaluing of women's labor the totality of women's reality, but just this aspect of it). unpaid or underpaid labor—defines women's reality (not reproduction and acquisition of surplus value through of women—and by this I mean the production and However, in a patriarchal society, the exploitation experienced by the wife of the owner of the factory. who works in a factory is radically different from that For example: The economic exploitation of a woman is fundamentally, but not exclusively, class-based. women as women. The economic exploitation of women without simultaneously abolishing the oppression of all possible to end the oppression of working-class women itself in so many ways, on so many levels, it is really not women? Since the oppression of women expresses liberation of all women, or just working-class, poor Should those who espouse socialism advocate the women, both in our condition as women and as workers. to the very definition of capitalism, so too is that of

Therefore, just as the exploitation of workers is central cannot function without women of all classes. their relation to the means of production but capitalism Leproduce capitalism in varying degrees depending on the functioning of capitalism. Women produce and women or the exploitation of women; it is central to more generally is not just about the mistreatment of the marketplace, in the home, or in the public sphere words, the oppression and exploitation of women in Social systems are an integrated whole. In other of women or, for that matter, the oppression of anyone. false and unhelpful way to understand the oppression of women living in capitalist society. However, that is a as a distinct reality that primarily defines the condition socialism, the oppression of women has been viewed a reality that transcends it. For much of the history of is both intertwined with capitalism and has acquired construction of socialism. The oppression of women capitalism nor will it automatically end with the The oppression of women did not begin with

working-class women? women are we talking about? All women? Or just socialism. Closely related to this discussion is: Which the liberation of women and the construction of and capitalism and the concomitant connection between noizzərqqo z'nəmow nəəwtəd qihznoitslər əht zi bətsdəb question? One of the thorny realities that Marxists have Has anyone ever heard it referred to as "the proletariat more general question of class struggle and revolution. somehow independent from and less important than the si bne nem mort noitelozi ni stsixe nemow to noizzerqqo This ontological and discursive framing suggests that the to the oppression of women as "the woman question."

Early socialists (and even some later ones) referred and applaud what we all say. have already agreed amongst ourselves that we will like some very challenging questions, but, we [the speakers]

Margaret Power: The organizers presented us with

Opening Remarks

Revolution_20151104>. at: <https://archive.org/details/Women_The_Longest_ The full audio recording of the event can be found online What follows is an edited transcript of their conversation. collective, and volunteer policy director of Gender JUST. Chicago, co-founder of the Against Equality editorial Nair, a Chicago-based writer, academic, and activist in at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and Yasmin of Red Wedge magazine, and current graduate student right; Brit Schulte, a grassroots organizer, founding editor several books on Latin American history and the political Illinois Institute of Technology and the author or editor of panelists were Margaret Power, professor of History at the discussion entitled "Women: The Longest Revolution?" The chapter of the Platypus Affiliated Society hosted a panel On November 4, 2015, the Loyola University Chicago

Margaret Power, Brit Schulte, Yasmin Nair

Women: The longest revolution?

Women, continued from page 1

fundamental way to influence and change their social position. In other words, women can become truly free and equal, only in a world organized along new social and productive lines

Kollontai recognizes that we cannot rely on an existing form which relies on the subjection of women to win our liberation. She continues, "each new gain of the working class represents a step leading mankind" -humankind-"towards the kingdom of freedom and social equality: each right that woman wins brings her nearer the defined goal of full emancipation." In this section she is specifically talking about several predominantly male revolutionaries who are carrying on about throwing all bourgeois feminism out of the door, writing it off as unnecessary, something that is not a part of a true revolutionary proletarian project. Kollontai is saying that if you can actually realize good wins, when people get a taste of what they can achieve as a right, then you can use

that to bolster people to move forward to win more. This leads to me to the idea of men comrades of the Left, which has particular implications for what we now refer to "fuckboys" and mansplaining and manspreading. We should find a way to work these into conversation, too, so we have a space to vent. Mujeres Libres was an organization founded in 1936 during the anarchist struggle in the Spanish Revolution and they had a lot to say about male anarchists that would mansplain within anarchist organizations. I want to share an amazing quote from Lucía Sánchez Saornil. She expresses that the general sentiment was that "All those compañeros, however radical they may be in cafes, unions, and even affinity groups [FAI], seem to drop their costumes as lovers of female liberation at the doors of their homes. Inside, they behave with their compañeras just like common husbands." That's something that still rings very true for revolutionary and even just campaign-based organizations of the day. When you are wanting, as a woman, to put an idea forward and you have ten men who have been in the organization for longer (or not even as long) immediately shut you down or create a space that is hostile to actually sharing your ideas and participating fully, it doesn't exactly lead to a healthy revolutionary candor when you're organizing at the grassroots level. Mujeres Libres does not get spoken of much in the anarchist tradition which is unfortunate because they were really trying to challenge a lot of this inherent misogyny and sexism with their organizing models.

The Combahee River Collective manifesto absolutely changed the way I interact with people in grassroots organizations. There's a guerrilla feminist quote that has been memed a million times: "My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit." That's a very new but correct way of looking at how we should see the struggle for liberation, specifically women's liberation, human liberation. The Combahee River Collective Statement was written in 1977 and it's the first time you see terms like "identity politics" being referenced and expressly labeled as such. Here's a great quote:

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice.

When we ask ourselves, "What has the Left been doing with questions like feminism, women's liberation, the central women questions," it is important to look at texts and organizations in which the question wasn't "How do we engage with that project?" That was the project. It's important to go back to these texts and these organizations, flawed as they were, to learn some of these lessons and to be able to not have to remake the wheel when you're in an organizing meeting on your campus or in your community. To be more express with what I mean by intersectionality, here's another amazing quote from the Combahee River Collective Statement:

"We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the politicaleconomic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses.

Is Marxism reductive? I call myself a Marxist-feminist I like the framework that historical materialism gives me. It allows me to look at a synthesis of events and to see history in a particular way that is not just written by the victor. I think that's a useful tool. Marxism gets a lot of flak specifically for this allegation of being too class-politics-based, of being reductive, of not centering the question. That allegation looks at Marx as a kind of dogma and that's not appropriate. You would want Marxism to be a framework like any other that you would use to analyze a particular set of historical events or social conditions, a living document that could change. You could add to it and use it the way you see fit. We shouldn't see Marxism or use Marxism as this stodgy, dogmatic tome which you just hurl at a problem. I often feel that I'm beating my head against the wall when talking with folks that would say, "Just throw Marxism out because certain people have used it in a reductive way." Well, don't talk to those certain people, don't read those certain things. Marxism is not

Yasmin Nair: My remarks will touch mainly upon three issues: the issue of trans representation in politics, the question of gay marriage, and the questions surrounding carceral feminism. My comments are embedded in a critique of neoliberalism and a critique of the neoliberal university in particular. In brief, I define neoliberalism as the relentless privatization of everyday life, and in terms of the larger economic developments, as the movement we have seen over the last 40 or 50 years to privatize the resources that involve our most basic needs (education, health care, schooling, water,

reductive. People who use it can be.

etc.) in the United States and in many parts of the world. The term "radical feminism" has a very particular meaning in trans discourse and is used to refer to a violently transphobic and trans-exclusionary set of discourses and practices. Julie Bindel is one of the most notorious examples. Capitalism thinks about gender in terms of bodies and it sees those bodies in terms of embodiments as "male" and "female." That is how it determines the value of embodied lives, and of course that leaves out non-binary people entirely, whether trans or cis. There is an easy and simplistic way to think about trans life within feminism and that is to bow to the imperative of representational politics, to simply say that the presence of trans people is an excellent thing, period. We are at a great moment in terms of where trans representation is, but not at a great moment in terms of critically thinking through all of that. Even the slightest critical interrogation of what that representation means is considered transphobic. But if we are to think about gender, embodiment, capitalism. and feminism, we have to ask the same question of what trans actually means with a greater degree of honesty

than to simply celebrate the presence of trans. To use an analogy, the presence of Hillary Clinton is lauded by mainstream feminists as in and of itself the best possible thing. Everywhere people are exhorted to vote for her simply because she is a woman and because it is assumed that we must have a female president no matter what. But as anyone with any serious commitment to Left politics can easily tell, Clinton has been an absolute disaster for us. It has by now been acknowledged that she had been a copresident with Bill Clinton, so we do need to make her responsible for those years of legislation: She has engendered a deeply carceral state, which is to say a state dependent upon punishment, and she is responsible for having created a system of welfare reform that has effectively disenfranchised millions of people—mostly poor, both black and white—and has created conditions that will leave them and succeeding generations in dire poverty

Similarly, we have to consider the conditions in which trans identities are made possible and question the extent to which the presence of very beautiful and perfect trans people like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock either enable or disable a critique of capitalism itself. Now, yes, they do both for instance question the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). But what does a trans feminism that takes into account the presence of the PIC, the medical industrial complex, and much more actually look like? And what do we do with trans feminism beyond representation? How do we think about, for instance, Caitlyn Jenner and what it means to be a wealthy trans person who has access to the medical-industrial complex? How do we relate that to feminism and questions around issues of access to, for instance, abortion, which is a medical procedure which we are continually denied? The Left is failing on abortion when it praises Pope Francis. The mainstream feminists have completely failed on abortion. Abortion needs to be accessible to everyone without question. But we've constantly slipped back on that. We're not connecting materialist economic questions around women's access to questions of what trans people have faced and continue to face. So when we talk about trans people having to do sex work we discuss it in very pathological terms: "isn't it awful that..." or "trans people are killed because they are targeted for being trans." Well. yes and no, because being trans in the United States also means not having access to a whole lot of things including housing, having to negotiate existences on the streets. That's what makes you vulnerable to being killed. It's not that they're targeted only because they are trans; the system is making them a target. So trans issues are at one and the same time being made visible and extraordinarily representational while a whole lot of other very complicated issues around plain economics or material realities are being shut out.

of marriage, of feminism's historical concern with marriage and with the role of women within the institution of marriage, which Juliet Mitchell talks about constantly. In a context where gay marriage is now a legislative triumph, it is assumed that ours is a better and more inclusive society because people can now get gay-married, that somehow marriage has changed fundamentally. So let me state very simply at the outset, in case there is any doubt about my position: Gay marriage and support for it among the Left in the U.S. and much of the world increasingly represents the abject failure of the Left to think strenuously and seriously about feminism and the role of marriage. Marriage remains a patriarchal institution and, more importantly, has become a way for a global and increasingly neoliberal economy to flex its muscles and to expand the power of the state to coerce people into unwilling relationships—mostly with itself. There is no subverting gay marriage

This brings us back inevitably to the question

There is a serious aftermath to the legalization of gay marriage. Gay marriage actually enables a privatization of resources; some have called it the handmaiden to neoliheralism. The proof is in this. Several private and public employers and increasingly many more (including the University of Illinois at Chicago) have now mandated that anyone who wants their

partner to remain on their health insurance must

now marry. This applies to gay and straight couples. The logic is simple: Because everyone can now get married everyone *must* get married. The extension of that logic is even more brutal: Marry or die. The question of feminism is relevant here and not just because straight couples are affected. What gav marriage teaches us is that gender has always been subordinated to these questions around marriage, and in a state without a guaranteed income and without healthcare, for instance, marriage is another way for the state to create more dependency. That's how the effects of gay marriage are to extend the neoliberal state. We have to consider what I think of as a necessary element of the feminist revolution: dismantling the necessity of marriage, making sure that marriage is not a price you pay, literally, with your life. It is absolutely no coincidence that Britain's National Health Service is facing attacks and attrition even as its conservative government is embracing gay marriage. The Left has capitulated throughout in that regard.

My last set of comments have to do with carceral

feminism and the impact that it has on feminism at

large, and on a very particular brand of feminism

emerging within and from the neoliberal university. I come at this as a prison abolitionist. The prisonindustrial complex (PIC) looms large in both obvious and unseen ways as a backdrop of feminism today. Feminism has increasingly over the last few decades actually taken on "carcereality" as a primary mode of being. The most prominent campaigns against violence like the one around campus sexual assaults that we see today tend to focus on imprisonment and sentencing as the best solution. One of the best books on this is Kristin Bumiller's *In an Abusive State: How* Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement against Sexual Violence. Bumiller talks about the ways in which the prison state, social service agencies, and domestic violence agencies that were in some part meant to protect women and their dependents are now being used to police, surveil, and incarcerate people, among them countless men and trans people. This contradiction has brought about what scholars like Elizabeth Bernstein and Janet Halley refer to as carceral feminism or governmental feminism, the idea that feminism functions most efficiently when it can be aided and abetted by enforcing the law and by enforcing the most punitive methods. In the Violence Against

response to the crisis of feminism. I'd like us to think more critically about sexual assault campaigns on campuses and about concepts like rape culture and sexual assault that have proliferated on campuses. All of that ties into a surveillance state. Emma Sulkowicz's mattress project, for instance, was very popular. But the minute the Obama administration passed the legislation that said "from now on we're going to be really tough on sexual assault," what happened instantly? Universities had to start reporting statistics and data to the state. The concept of rape culture is very popular. But I'm extremely critical of the term. It tends to turn sexual vulnerability and rape into a kind of blanket-form thing that simply oppresses us and which we can't really navigate through any kind of systemic

Women Act, for instance, it is mandated that the first

response in domestic violence situations be arrest and

imprisonment. It is conventional these days to think

about carceral feminism as the binding, foundational

means. "Rape culture" has become a way to mobilize a state of paranoia and extreme vulnerability and then to invoke over and over again the carceral state: "if you want to avoid rape culture here are the things you must do," or "rape culture exists, therefore..." The prison industrial complex is not just prisons; it is the cameras and emergency telephones that you have on campuses like Loyola. It is also the culture of paranoia and fear that women are constantly asked to dwell within, as opposed to thinking more broadly about how exactly sexual assault comes about and the vulnerability of the neoliberal subject. In a recent essay on sex work Melissa Gira Grant writes that "this ground is soaked with blood." When we ask these questions around feminism and vulnerability and who gets represented and who doesn't, we have to consider that the ground we are walking on is already soaked with blood.

A recent article by Laura Kipnis looked at how universities and students have responded to sexual assault on campus. Kipnis's thesis is that university administrations win in these situations: They expand their power and oversight. tapping into the paranoia that Yasmin described. Students are being taught to look to university administrations to solve problems as opposed to each other, to always "go up" instead of horizontal. How do you create a response to sexual assault that moves beyond that?

YN: Fredrik deBoer wrote a good essay about what he would call the infantilization of the student body. Every year you have a freshmen class, mostly between 17 and 19 years old, many of whom have never learned how to negotiate sexual relationships. We live in America where you're not supposed to discuss sex or have sexual education in schools. They're thrust into a campus environment which is completely different, away from their parents, neighborhoods, and communities. You put this vat of people in this cauldron of intense sexuality, longings, encounters, etc., and you don't show them how to negotiate that other than some sort of mandatory Powerpoint lecture with horrible skits on their first day on campus

There's a class element to all of this: mostly these situations happen at universities like Northwestern, University of Illinois at Chicago, etc. A lot of times what happens between people is something that's not even recognized by them. In one case a person was told "you raped me", and he genuinely said "I did? I had no idea," because what is defined as rape now is also a matter of a problematic set of legislative dictates: "This means non-consent, therefore non consent means rape." When people I know tried to negotiate a different response that would not ruin people's lives when accusations are made the university came down on that really hard. There are economic and legislative reasons for that: funders, donors, the PIC, the threat of losing federal Title IX funding. So there's a structural element to all of this.

BS: Title IX is the perfect microcosm of carceral feminism, taking away agency from people, specifically survivors, and putting it in the hands of the police and your campus administrators, people who report their statistics to a federal government agency because they rely on that money. All you are to them at the end of the day is a dollar sign. They are not on your side. They certainly weren't on my side when I was raped at my undergraduate university and they weren't on the side of a number of other people who have had all kinds of experiences happen to them via campus police and campus administrators. This does not get solved by any of these current institutions. There's nothing transformative about it, nothing that actually builds community and supports survivors. These are things we have to imagine, we have to build. Yasmin is absolutely correct on this. Our bodies are going to constantly come in conflict with one another, we're going to be confrontational, so how do you negotiate these things in ns that are proven t be racist and classist and sexist?

Margaret, you wrote a book on how women in Chile ended up opposing socialism and supporting the Right. What was it about the politics of the Chilean workers movement that made it the Left in the first place? What would they have had to do politically in order to have gotten more Chilean women on board, and what are the possibilities for such a politics today?

MP: The right is very powerful and has a tremendous amount of appeal in the world; we on the Left need to understand what that appeal is. My first book was about why a majority of the women in Chile opposed Allende and supported the Pinochet dictatorship. That happened in part because of the failures of the Left to actually understand women's situation. The socalled Marxist Left prioritized the male workers, the proletariat, and ignored women's reality; this left this huge open space for the Christian Democrats (which were Christian centrist parties) and various political organizations on the right to organize women. Chile under Allende opened for many people the possibility of a profound transformation of society. Popular Unity gave people dignity for the first time, people who had been told they were workers or peasants. But as *Mujeres* Libres described, you had men who were completely revolutionary outside but at home they ordered women around completely. Where's the revolution? Where's the

I was friends with a lot of Left women and they had interpreted feminism based on what the male party leadership said it was: a northern US/European bourgeois movement whose sole raisond'être was to divide the working class. This meant that what feminist women really did was go around sleeping with men, meaning your boyfriend or husband. This was a distortion of what feminism was all about. It undercut women's ability to organize as women and to critically analyze some real problems. But then all of these women went into exile, some in the United States but mainly in Europe, and they became transformed by the feminist movement. Then they raised one of the main slogans of the feminist movement in Chile during the years when they were fighting against Pinochet: "Democracy in the streets, and in the home." It was incredibly revolutionary to be calling for democracy in the home because democracy in the home means an end to patriarchy. Women pushed back and challenged the Left in Chile.

That's the only reason Michelle Bachelet won the presidency. She's a socialist, an agnostic, a single mother. She was a political prisoner and was tortured. I'm not saying she's a perfect president—there have been a lot of criticisms—but the fact that she was elected was important because she spoke directly to women about women's condition as women. Therefore women voted for her. There was this myth in Chile that women are conservative and backward. Of course you're going to have those politics if women aren't leading. Unless women have their own organizations, who will be defining our reality and our struggles for us?

When I was becoming radicalized I had a mentor who considered herself a feminist. We disagreed over the question of men. She believed that a man could not be a feminist—but he could be an ally. I found that to be a very self-defeating approach. Within feminist discourse I sometimes hear this pessimism about what men can be, about male sexuality. 'Rape culture' expresses this

paranoia about the "true agenda" of men to some extent. What is the role of men in the movement?

BS: I wish we had a movement!

MP: A movement, wouldn't that be nice! But of course men can be feminists because feminism is an idea or way of being, a way of thinking about things. If we don't think men can be feminists, what are we saying? I think white people can not be racist. I think everyone can change. I was once a Young Republican! I'm coming at this more optimistically. I think men have to play a role. If we can't build organizations now in which male domination is not only challenged but also eliminated, in which men actually understand why it's so critical that they not be the way that so much of society teaches them to be, how can we produce a change in the future? **BS:** I absolutely hate the term ally. I would much prefer

an accomplice to an ally. 'Ally' is imbued with passivity: "I stand with you," and then you get to just stand, you don't have to get dirty. It's essential to demand that people become your accomplices in a project of human liberation. That said. I work with a lot of dicks, both literally and figuratively. Fighting for space is a constant struggle. Why is it an argument that we're still having within various organizations, that you actually have to demand leadership roles for women, for queer folk, for people who are not "naturally," in this society, seen as leaders, for people who are not able to assume those roles because of whatever system of—I shudder to use the term privilege, but privilege—that benefits some folks? So, would I prefer to see more women and femme folk leading organizations? Absolutely, but they're doing that. Those organizations exist and you can support them: There's an amazing new group called Assata's Daughters, a kind of Afro-futuristic Black-qirlmagic project. We also need to think about forms of organization. A hierarchical movement is necessarily patriarchal. Horizontality is necessary.

I use the term 'rape culture' to describe a myriad of expressions of a deep violent misogyny that exists specifically towards women but also towards gendernon-conforming bodies. Expanding what we mean when we say rape is incredibly important, especially in a society that says women are always victim. I agree with Yasmin's point about the way in which people utilize these feminist sloganeerings to invoke the state, to invoke the police. The case of Tiawanda Moore is one of many examples of the way in which the Chicago Police Department is an institution of systematic sexual violence and rape, an example that easily identifiable. in my estimation, as part of a rape culture. That stems from a deeply patriarchal, but also capitalist, racist society: Chicago is a microcosm of that. If you do only one thing after this panel, read everything Mariame Kaba has written. You can find her on twitter @prisonculture.

YN: I like to think in terms of patriarchy and masculinity more than questions around men. Whether it's two men or two women, gay marriage still reproduces the patriarchy through the way it plugs into the economy. There's also the question of masculinity and how people are raised and compelled to enact and act upon their instincts. That's actually something we see in the queer community a lot-- investment in masculinity, investment in femininity-- and those are problems. There's an "interesting" new book called *The Feminist* Utonia Project, a collection of 57 essays asking what a feminist utopia looks like. The book barely asks anything about socialism and it barely references feminists prior to 1995. The emphasis is on how feminism can help women and feminists of all genders feel better; this is the utopia they imagine. The question for us has to be: How do we create a better world? One essay about sports claims that if you just had more women in sports there would be much less violence and exploitation. What are you talking about? Including women in the arena of sports is not going to make sports less of violent and patriarchal modes of being, which are terrible for society. So obviously I disagree with the idea that you can't have men in feminism, but the bigger question is: What do we do with traditional masculinity and patriarchy and how do we move away from those modes of being? That's a different and more fundamental question. Who or what is a man? Who or what is a woman?

The tradition of socialism focuses on labor, which relates to the question of marriage as domestic labor for women...

YN: And to marriage as sex work, in the traditional representation!

...so what is unique to feminine labor? I work in a cafe in the service industry. The general labor force is becoming more feminized. Is that the case only on a metaphorical level? Does it have something to do with feminine labor as such?

YN: The concept of emotional labor explains why working as a barista is becoming increasingly feminized.

BS: It's not coincidental and it's certainly not just metaphorical. You can devalue the labor of women, femme folk, queer folk, folks of varying degrees of ability and different ethnic backgrounds, who are constantly pushed into service industry positions. You can pay them less. You can get rid of people. They'll call it the 'pinking' of industries as well, which is insulting. During Occupy some essays were written on the idea of the precariat as opposed to the proletariat. I'm not so much in agreement with the idea but the reality of service industry work is a constantly revolving door.

This is a good moment to talk about social reproduction theory. Tithi Bhattacharya puts forward the idea of uncompensated, emotional labor within the home and then the actual social reproduction that goes into creating another workforce: bearing children, cleaning, cooking, managing domestic spaces. The care-giving role feeds into feminized labor. It's not paid. It's devalued. On questions around women entering the workforce I also want to recommend Angela Davis's

YN: The crisis of 2008 was supposedly also a crisis for men who were suddenly unable to sustain their families on what little money they were making. Masculinity is woven into capitalism in terms of the family.

book Women, Race and Class.

Ruth Bader-Ginsburg once said that true equality won't be achieved until the U.S. Supreme Court is all female. This engaged mainstream feminists who considered that unequal for men. What do you think about gender equity and how does it relate to the commodification of women?

BS: The biggest problem is that the Supreme Court exists, that the courts exist. The way we try to negotiate relationships via property is the problem. It strikes me as odd that the solution would be to improve an already deeply flawed property-based Supreme Court as opposed to actually just improving people's lives. In terms of gender equity, just including women on, say, a decision-making panel doesn't necessarily mean that they won't all be fascist women.

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Q & A:

With the fantastic victories of the 1970s, radical feminism and the reform movement achieved many rights: the right to abortion, the right to access proper healthcare, birth control. These kinds of reforms have been receiving a backlash in the U.S., but with the continuation of the current direction of the European Union we will probably see the cutting back of benefits for women. So we have the pressure of these rollbacks in particular in the U.S., I think very much pushed by Hillary Clinton: Funding of single mothers to raise children has been one of the major slashes of funding that Clinton supported. Though we have to defend and push against those backlashes, I also want to talk about more radical directions and opportunities. I read a Shulamith Firestone book and was completely absorbed because it proposed the idea that in a futuristic society, women wouldn't have to carry a child themselves. The society could instead somehow use a fantastical machine. What are some radical demands that we want for women? Is equality all that we want?

LP: I don't know if anyone has seen or remembers this movie from the 90s, *Junior*, with Arnold Schwarzenegger. It's horrible in terms of its representation of traditional gender, but in terms of reproduction, why not demand that men actually have the right to bear a child? Yes, it could be done by machines too, but why not?

UJ: I'm not sure how many women are here that have given birth. But I certainly won't have that right taken away from me, because that was a great experience and I wish it to a lot of you

JM: Equality under this system won't really come into play because capitalism uses divisions—whether it's sexism, or racism, or homophobia—to undermine working class solidarity. It also undermines wages and all sorts of other things. Even when there are gains on one level, there are always the reactionary bits on the other. I don't know if anyone has heard about the Hobby Lobby ruling that came through that more or less gave this boss the rights over the contraception that he would provide for his women workers. "His right" as an employer trumps the rights of his women workers. These are some of the issues that the trade unions should be fighting for. That's why it's really important within trade unions, within political parties, within revolutionary parties, to have structures where women are organizing themselves and fighting for their fights within the organization. Because unless we raise our voices, we wait. Unless we organize together and we fight against the sexism that pervades society, then we'll always just be doing these two-bit little things. When we talk about transforming society, that's the way we're going to do it.

One issue where certain strains of feminism conflict with other tendencies on the Left is not so much economic demands for equality or reproductive rights or things like that, but the very complicated question of sexual liberation in general—what that means. I was thinking about the scandal of the Socialist Workers Party in the UK. Also, there's the issue that's very big on American college campuses now: the whole discussion about rape culture. Or even the pornography wars of the 1980s. How do all of you see these issues and how they play out?

LP: It was a real crisis for the SWP, but it became understood in very peculiar ways. It became understood that it somehow also related to the problem of democratic centralism. Actually, many anarchist movements and other leftist organizations have had problems of exploitation taking place. But the failure of the SWP to address that question has probably ruined Marxism for many young women. However, there are many young women also still working within the SWP, and I'm not prepared to call the SWP "rape apologists" for continuing to think that their organization has some value for raising issues about socialism. But still, there's this problem of where the Left is at. These kinds of crises seem to tear these small organizations apart. even though the organizations themselves have such little impact on society.

CM: I'm stuck with what was just said, that the groups are torn apart by these scandals, because that really sounds like this old "feminists dividing the working class" idea—that's not the way you wanted to go right?

LP: No it's also a problem with leftism in this period of the Left's death or decline. They're real controversies, I don't want to deny that is the case. But these groups are so small that when these controversies occur the organization is unable to work through it and it just furthers disintegration.

JM: Workers Power in Britain wrote a number of articles about the SWP crisis. It is a terrible situation that also was compounded with the undemocratic nature of the SWP itself. And that doesn't mean its democratic centralism, or its ideal of democratic centralism. But also it was the economism and tailism of the SWP that was really the root of the problem. What do I mean by that? The SWP has never acknowledged the material benefits that men derive from sexism within society, so they argue that it is an ideology that comes down from the top, the capitalists, and that it is somehow taken up within the working class. And that is not the case actually. This does not mean that men conspire with capitalists and oppress women, but they do have material benefit.

Also, the way the SWP actually handled it was a problem. They have this idea that women don't need to have a special structure within the organization. They refuse to allow women to caucus and to actually have this discussion out, so the structure of the organization is very undemocratic. We were arguing that the women in the SWP should caucus together. At that conference where they actually discussed it, right after the vote was taken—in which it was very narrowly decided that there was no case to be found—they shut down all discussion about it, completely. That is what led to the splits and everything. It is very important that different groups of oppressed within organizations should have the right to caucus. It is not as if it is going to completely eradicate all sexist behavior, but it will give the people that are affected the agency to actually change the culture within an organization. Especially at this time of the crisis of capitalism women are being hit hard, their voices are not being heard loud enough. That is what I mean with agencies of change.

UJ: Feminism has a bad name in Germany. Their role within the Third Reich was certainly bad. They were all for "Küche, Kirche, Kinder"—Kitchen, Church, Children—one of the fascist slogans. The feminist organizations dissolved themselves into fascist organizations here in Germany. Feminism is not something that you would call yourself if you have a little bit of an idea about history in this country. So if you want to be in an organization that is not a feminist organization, but is one that works for women's rights I might even join you. But just like I don't call the Soviet Union a workers' state, which we did in 1917—we had to find a new name, we called it a degenerated workers' state—I wouldn't call myself a feminist. I wouldn't be caught dead calling myself a feminist.

What about Jewish feminists? Don't they exist for you?

CM: They called themselves women's rights activists; they didn't use the term feminist.

UJ: Good. I notice that you call yourself a feminist and I wouldn't call myself that. But assuming that we are now talking about a women's organization, then the question would be: What kind of women's organization is that? Is it a women's organization that is across class lines? Would I have to be with Hillary Clinton in one organization? I don't know a good example from the other countries.

Angela Merkel!

UJ: Angela Merkel. Yeah, I wouldn't want to be with her in one organization. I don't think that she will apply to the IBT, but that makes me feel good actually.

I find it weird as an argument to say that most feminists went over to fascism. Because, at least in Austria, where I am from, a lot of the women who fought for their rights were communists and Jewish, and they had to leave the country. So obviously there was no women's movement afterwards because they were all gone. They certainly did not go over to fascism. And secondly, Ursula, you said that Marxism always fought for women's rights. I have a couple of examples of sexism in leftist, socialist, and Marxists groups. The first one is male domination in groups and organizations—the dominance of speech or hierarchies. It is that the pseudo-feminist men, who try to explain to woman how feminism works. And then there are groups

is abortion rights. But that is not where it should stand. It should be much more

Quotas are always a bit of a problem. I recognize that certain quotas have helped women to get more jobs and hierarchically higher jobs, in certain places. But if it wouldn't have been Lenin's turn but instead the turn of a woman in 1917, I would find that very sad.

JM: Having more women bosses actually won't make much difference for women workers, right? That isn't going to actually make a difference whatsoever.

Can it be that the emancipation of women is not possible under the conditions of capitalism? And still that the transformation of capitalism to what was called "socialism by Marxism would not be possible without taking the women's question seriously and pushing this to its own limits? And even understanding the contradiction that traditional Marxism had? And isn't this brought up by Mitchell and still seems to be unanswered by Marxism today?

 $\textbf{LP}{:} \ I \ find \ it \ quite \ compelling \ the \ idea \ that \ somehow$ the class struggle is the motor of history, but also I am still trying to understand what that means. And especially what that means in neoliberalism, which also has this character of being post-historical or no longer concerned with the understanding of history. For Marx, capitalism is historically specific. This means questions of freedom and women's freedom have been posed in a particular way in modern society, that they have not been in previous, traditional forms of society. So it is a peculiar problem to modernism.

More concretely, I wanted also to say something about quotas, especially within leftist organizations. I have a lot of ambivalence about talking on a panel discussion like this because I am a woman, and I would like to be in a situation where we could have had a man on the panel as well



where men dominate the group and decide the gendered language of every piece that is published by that group. This also concerns trans-persons. Also, a lot of the time I notice that woman in leftist groups do all the productive work—the workload for women is much higher. Also a lot of men just don't deal with feminism. They call themselves feminists, they call themselves communists, and they say that they want the emancipation and freedom and equality for everyone, but they just don't deal with feminism. And also a lot of leftist groups don't accept women's spaces. So I wouldn't necessarily say that Marxism always fought for women's rights.

CM: For me it's important to really raise the question why these groups are so small and unimportant, and so unattractive for everybody. I have heard before, "Oh, we are only men in this group, on this panel. Let's find women. But they're so hard to find." The same goes with the guestion of social relations of race, and unless there's some serious consideration of sexism going on

in these groups, people should stop to wonder why. You've been saying that intersectionality would only speak about oppression and would not sufficiently address agency. I don't agree with this. There has been intersection thinking about relations of oppression and exploitation in feminism before—the Combahee River Collective for example. There's an entire tradition. I mean Angela Davis, right? We've been trying to think that together.

LP: From a gender studies perspective, how do you approach the question of history? How does gender arise in history, and what do we do about it?

CM: Obviously at least since the 60s and the 70s, there has been a huge research field opened up by feminist historians. They first wanted to look back because history had, up to that point, been written by men about men. This is in part due to the exclusion of women from universities all together, so there has been a long and very complicated enterprise to write history with regards to women. Now they are starting to try and understand that there is not just one history of women, and they are trying to understand women also as an intersectional category. So there's different history if you're writing history about women in slavery, if you're writing in colonialism, if you're writing history of bourgeois women. They're trying to understand this in an intersectional framework, which I would still try to hold up.

I appreciated Cornelia's reference about the oppression of being born male or female, but what about Marx saying that humanity produces its own species-being, that it's nature is that it has no nature? True, Marxists may have forgotten this aspect, but people also forget that this issue of freedom was raised by Marx and Marxism. Also, do the panelists adopt any specific demands about polygamy vs. monogamy, or opposition to nuclear family, etc.?

UJ: The IBT doesn't particularly care what people do in their bedrooms, or, if you want to say, in the fields, when the weather is good. We don't really care about that as long as everybody involved is doing so of their own free will.

How would you define reformism? What do you think about the mainstream media excitement with gender quotas? Is that progress?

UJ: There is a big difference between reformism and Marxism. Reformism is the enemy of Marxism. If the reformists win a reform, that is fine with us. But that is not what we stand for. If reforms fall off the tree, we really wanted not the leaf but the tree. It is a different thing. We will also take the leaf. We will even defend it if somebody wants to take it away from us. But reformism is an obstacle to the revolution. And that obstacle needs to be politically fought against. Let's say a good reform

Sometimes I am not sure if I am being selected on part of the quota, and if so, what I am representing. I was briefly being voted into a branch position in Left Unity in the UK. I was elected to represent a branch from only going to two meetings. How am I supposed to be qualified to represent the interests of everyone within the branch meeting, when I am still kind of getting to know what people in the organization are talking about? And also, on the flipside, how could I represent women in general within this organization? This is a real

CM: Modernity is a really, really problematic project. There have been many critical writings also on the project of modernity as a colonialist project, and obviously there are feminist writings that have shown that the way we understand gender as a binary concept has actually only evolved as a bourgeois project—in and of modernity. So modernity is not a very positive term I guess for anti-colonialist and feminist struggles.

If I go outside this room and talk to some normal people

people that I would meet in daily life—and particularly in the United States—terms like racism, sexism, and homophobia mean a lot to them. They can relate to all of those three terms. However, thinking about class struggle? That's extremely alien to people. That wouldn't necessarily have been the case in the past. Sometimes I feel that the language of specific oppression has rendered class struggle or Marxism a foreign language that is no longer understandable to people. So, there's a lot of talk of talk about how Obama's the first black president, or Hillary Clinton, or gay rights. But not especially the questions of broader economic organization. Even when we're talking about "How would you separate feminism and Marxism?" it seems to me that in mainstream society that's what's done all the time. I wonder how you would see that development? We can say that Marxism must pay attention to these specificities. But in general society, those specificities are what people see as "the struggle" for the Left.

UJ: Certainly most people who work have heard a little bit about Marx even if they might not understand Marxism. Let's not forget that with the bank crisis. all kinds of bourgeois newspapers suddenly came out saying things like "Marx is right." And people understood it, though they might never have heard or read a word of what Marx wrote.

CM: It is really crucial to understand why Marxism seems like a jargon not understandable to anybody else, although the other struggles were more successful in trying to make their points to a broader society. It is because they have evolved and have exchanged with different parts of society. For example, is anyone familiar with the recent Care Revolution initiative? So, feminists have tried to contribute to social critique and have tried to react to the crisis from the standpoint of reproduction by building networks like these. Some Marxist groups just don't want to know about feminism. So, you can't do anything about it.

analysis, an understanding of how capitalism works. Within that it sees the centrality of the fight between the two historic classes: the bourgeoisie and the working class. Who owns the means of production and how we are going to transform society—how would you do that? I am not guite sure how successful feminism is. It is in the sense that it is working within the system and it is fighting for the reforms, but at the end of the day that system of oppression still exists. And so to me that is what we should be aiming at. Our target is to actually smash capitalism, smash the systems of oppression, and unfold a whole new world. That is my goal. IP

JM: Marxism isn't a magical theory. It is a materialist

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MP: The call for gender equity is basically saying that the structure is OK; we just need to have equal numbers. This structure has been set up to reflect both the capitalist system and the patriarchal system; that's the antithesis of what we should strive for. I do not think that feminism means getting women to be more like men. Men have set things up in a pretty nasty way. Why would women want to be part of that? For me, feminism is about transforming society, not about slotting women into it.

Like a lot of sex workers I went into it for the money and the agency. Do you think there's a space for sex work in the ideal socialist utopia?

BS: If people wouldn't participate in sexual activities that look like they do now, I would only imagine that you would have the kind of agency and fulfillment, the kind of radical and enthusiastic consent that would inform practices that would make you feel whole, that would make you feel complete as a person. Or you would be able to abstain from any sexual activity at all and not feel like it was a necessary part of your experience. It's a really lovely question to think about. But the sex industry is still by and large controlled and dominated by the male fantasy. There's amazing feminist norn. I'm a very sex-positive person. People should do what they want to do. But we can't pretend we can have sex outside of the world that we live in. The world that we live in is wrong and hurts. The way in which we interact with other people's bodies is a constant negotiation.

Margaret, you raised the idea that women's liberation and the transcendence of capitalism should not necessarily be equated. What then would the transition from capitalism to socialism mean to you concretely? With Sanders campaign in mind, many people tend to understand many things under "socialism." from mid-twentieth centurv social democracv to the Trotskyist or Bolshevik understanding of dictatorship of the proletariat. We actually don't know what either socialism or women's liberation would mean because we haven't achieved either vet.

MP: To just have socialism doesn't automatically ipso facto mean you're going to have women's liberation. What do I think socialism would be? It's all so hypothetical. We have to talk about what capitalism is. what neoliberalism is all about. We have to present to people the idea that there are real alternatives, that this is a system based on the dehumanization of everybody. How can you say, for example, that people have to pay for water? We need to point out the contradictions that exist in our society. But I do think we need to avoid labels, to avoid saying, "This is Marxism, that is not Marxism." The more concrete and direct thing is to say, This is wrong and this shouldn't be happening and something else could be coming into existence." I'm not particularly into electoral politics. I'm sure there's some positive stuff coming from Bernie Sanders's campaign but I think he'll generate enthusiasm that will probably shift into Hillary Clinton's campaign. Having said that, what does it mean that people are responding to Bernie Sanders? That does create a political opening of people saying that they realize something is fundamentally wrong in this country. The Sanders campaign appears to be the option either most available to them or clearest to them. Those of us who define ourselves as socialists have to point out the weaknesses in a program that supports militarism and in a foreign policy that supports military aid to Israel. That is a fundamental crime. How can you call yourself a socialist and say we should support Israel or any occupying nation around the world? Surveys have been finding that the younger

socialism. Since you are younger than I am, do you find that to be true? I don't think I've ever had a problem telling someone my

own age I'm a socialist; even people who disagree are generally open to the idea of discussing it.

generation is much more open to or supportive of

MP: I wonder how much that's because socialism doesn't mean that much to people or doesn't appear to

The failure of the Left in the United States means that in a sense no one knows what socialism means, or even what capitalism means. I don't think my peers could define either of those terms.

MP: You say the failure of the socialist movement around the world means that people don't know what socialism means but I don't think we can divorce the failure of the socialist movement from the power of capitalism. The failures of the socialist movement aren't just internal to the socialist movement; they're very much related to the power of capitalism and imperialism to penetrate, distort, and defeat socialism materially, politically, and socially.

It's interesting to consider the question of whether the Left failed or whether capitalism simply defeated socialism in light of feminist politics and gender. As Margaret described, by the mid-twentieth century, many viewed socialism as an economic program that would address the concerns of the white unionized working class; socialists could accuse feminists of taking up a bourgeois politics that threatened to split their movement, but their own class-based politics didn't seem to have a compelling approach to understanding and overcoming gender. How did it get to that point? The socialism over which the Pankhurst sisters split during the First World War or the experiments in alternative domestic arrangements during the early years of the Russian Revolution indicate a more vibrant socialism, one that had not calcified into a "male" politics. Some would blame Stalinism more than capitalism for these ideological problems on the Left.

MP: You can't disassociate capitalism from socialism. The two are dialectically related. All attempts to create a socialist society have taken place in a world in which everybody grew up in a capitalist society; they were exposed to capitalist economic relationships. Mario Roberto Santucho, a guerrilla leader in Argentina, wrote an important pamphlet in which he argued that socialism is morality. I know morality is not exactly in vogue but we have to reassert the fact that socialism is a moral system, fundamentally about treating people with dignity and respect and fairness and justice. That is not how you're taught to treat people when you grow up in a capitalist society. I can espouse these ideas about socialism, but does that mean, in every aspect of my life all the time, I'm this model person? No! I grew up in and live in a society that's constantly telling me not to be that way. We can't transform society overnight. It's very, very difficult, especially when you consider the attacks and assaults that capitalism or imperialism unleash against societies that attempt to build socialism. It's too easy just to say it's Stalinism. It's too easy

just to say it's just internal failures. We can come up with a perfect way to do something, but then once we start to do it you know we will have problems. Men in the audience talked more than women during this conversation. I don't think the men shouldn't have talked, but aren't we repeating some of the gender dynamics internally here? We may have these great ideas but sometimes we just go off running in our gendered traditions and practices—and this is a microcosm of that. How do we change? IP

Women: The longest revolution?

Cornelia Möser, Lucy Parker, Ursula Jensen, Joy McReady

On November 7, 2015, the Platypus Affiliated Society hosted a panel discussion at its 2nd European Conference in Frankfurt entitled "Women: The Longest Revolution?" The panelists were Cornelia Möser, who earned her PhD in gender studies and political science and is a researcher for the CNRS at the CRESPPA-GTM in Paris; Lucy Parker, a member of Platypus based in London; Joy McReady, a journalist and revolutionary social activist who writes a monthly column on women's liberation for Workers' Power, the British section of the League for the Fifth International; and Ursula Jensen, a founding member of the International Bolshevik Tendency and a longterm member of the works council within the IG Metall. What follows is a heavily edited transcript of their conversation. The full audio recording of the event can be found online at: http://platypus1917.org/2015/12/18/11-07-2015- women-longest-revolution/>.

Opening Remarks

Cornelia Möser: Juliet Mitchell says that women's liberation has a "totalistic quality," meaning that it is necessary in order to reach human freedom in general. Yet the struggle for women's liberation did not sign up as such for liberating the working class from capitalism. It signed up for liberating women—all women, so also working class women—from patriarchy, male domination, male chauvinism, heterosexism, gender oppression. I know this question very well from socialist and Marxist contexts, and it is almost always expressed in order to reduce feminist struggles to the place of the less important struggle. If you're asking, "What has feminism done for class struggle?" I suggest you also ask, "What has socialism and Marxism done against sexism and male dominance, even if only in their own groups?"

If we understand human freedom to be the freedom of all humans, not only of white worker male humans, we have to take into account a number of struggles, and feminism is one of them. Even Juliet Mitchell brings up the history of how radical feminism can also partly be seen as being the result of white sexism in Marxism and socialism. So I agree with Mitchell when she argues that there have always been feminists who saw feminism as the struggle for human emancipation. Feminists read their Marx, their Engels, their Adorno, and their Foucault, but at the same time, unfortunately that cannot be said of male socialists interested in feminist theory. I feel that feminist theory has remained an accessory to the dominant left until today. So until this situation stops, human freedom is not possible, at least not with left-wing politics.

Women's liberation has been successful in the last decade, and I guess the same cannot be said about man's emancipation. As humans, men, women, and non-conformist genders obviously also need general social change concerning the mode of production, but this is very much linked to feminist struggles as the economy is always already gendered, and this needs to be taken into account. Is revolution needed for women's liberation? That really depends on what you understand by "revolution." This term can imply warlike scenes or riot scenes and some prefer to think of revolution as a radical change that can also happen through persistent politics like reforms or collective mobilizations.

I have heard very often in Marxist circles that feminism is kind of like the result also of changes of capitalism, that it's just the way that society adapted to capitalist change. And then, if that is what you are trying to say, I am always surprised how Marxists forget all about their Marx when it comes to feminism. Because he already has told us that history is the history of class struggle, and that there is no teleological or God-given prescribed forces or nature that forms history. So he insists that societies change because people's struggle over power and influence over rights and over the distribution of living conditions, and that also applies for feminism. So obviously feminists have been part of this historical process. If by that you wanted to say that feminism profited from the failure of socialism, my answer would be absolutely not. Especially in Germany, I feel like there is East German socialism, women have lost many things, along with them the right to abortion that we don't have any more since the fall of socialism.

So, can feminism and Marxism be combined? I have to ask back, how can they not be combined? There is a tendency in Marxism to forget that women are also workers and that workers are also women. So obviously it cannot not be combined.

It is true, the so-called second-wave feminism was kind of detached from the first wave of feminism. When they talk about their starting point, they explain it as kind of like starting from scratch. So they were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., and in Europe often they described their consciousnessraising as being part of the general movement of the New Left in the 1960s, where Marxist frameworks of thought were very popular. But in fact, though they have integrated these frameworks of thought into their own theoretical productions, they have also experienced their limitedness: These Marxist theories could not explain gender oppression the way that feminists were experiencing it. And this is why they not only turned to what people call structuralist and poststructuralist theory, but I would go so far as to say that they even formed the broad part of these theories. For example, Foucault's rethinking of power was also in reaction to the failure of the '68 revolts. The feminists also experienced the same frustration with Marxist explanations of how power works in society. This is what unites them with what is called postmodernist thought, and why there was this strong exchange.

Lastly, has the situation of women in the world changed since the 1960s? Of course it has, with and without feminism, and especially in the dominant rich countries. I am not a demographer and not in any way qualified to tell you the details about the many changes in gender and sexual politics worldwide. Within feminism, there are ongoing debates on how even to quantify or objectify freedom or equality—a question that remains complicated way beyond feminism. From personal political experience. I have to say that in most places in the world, we cannot afford to let go of politics of equality even though we have to bear in mind their limitedness. A feminist revolution obviously is on a symbolic level and also on a cultural and interpersonal level. The feminist struggle has always simultaneously played on all these different levels, and that is good.

Ursula Jensen: Marxists know very well that a worker, about whom we speak when we say "working class," can very well be a black female gay handicapped single

mother. So a worker in our view is not necessarily a man. While Marxists and feminists often find themselves on the same side in struggles for women's rights, they hold two fundamentally incompatible worldviews. Feminism is an ideology premised on the idea that the fundamental division in human society is between the sexes rather than between social classes. Feminist

ideologues consequently see the struggle for female equality as separate from the fight for socialism, which many dismiss as merely an alternative form of patriarchal rule. In the past several decades, feminist writers and academics have drawn attention to the variety and extent of male supremacist practices in contemporary society. Feminists have taken the lead in exposing many of the pathological manifestations of sexism in private life—from sexual harassment to rape and domestic violence. Prior to the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1960s, these issues received little attention from either liberal or leftist social critics. Feminists have also been active in international campaigns against female genital mutilation in Africa, female infanticide in Asia, and the imposition of the veil in the Islamic world. Feminist analysis is often useful in raising awareness of sexism in capitalist society. But it typically fails to make a connection between male supremacy and the system of class domination which underlies it.

Marxists maintain that class conflict is the motor force of history and reject the notion that there are irreconcilable differences between the interests of men and women. We do not deny that men are the agents of women's oppression, or that men benefit from it, both in material and psychological terms. Yet the benefits that most men derive from women's inequality are petty, hollow, and transitory, and the costs that accompany them are substantial. Undervaluation of traditionally so-called "female work," while appearing to benefit the men, who are better paid and have more job security, in fact exerts downward pressure on wages generally. The same applies to wage discrimination against any other sector of the work force. In addition to lowering wage rates, male chauvinism, like racism, nationalism, homophobia, and other backward ideologies, obscures the mechanisms of social control and divides those at the bottom against each other, thereby providing a bulwark for hierarchical and intrinsically oppressive

It is true that female oppression is a trans-class phenomenon that affects all women, not merely those who are poor or working class. The degree of oppression and its consequences, however, are qualitatively different for members of different social classes. The privilege and material benefit enjoyed by ruling class women give them a powerful interest in preserving the existing social order.

The notion that women's oppression would continue to be a feature of life under socialism seemed obvious to those New Left radicals who viewed the economically backward, nationally isolated deformed worker states of Cuba, China, North Vietnam, North Korea, and Albania as functioning socialist societies. While women made very important gains everywhere capitalist rule had been overthrown, the parasitic and overwhelmingly male ruling bureaucracy in these Stalinist police states promoted women's roles as breeder, mother, and homemaker. Leon Trotsky pointed out in *The Revolution* Betrayed that the Stalinist apparatus was an obstacle to the development of socialism and criticized "the social interest of the ruling stratum in the deepening of bourgeois law," in connection with its attempt to prop up the socialist family. Feminist pessimism regarding the prospects for women under socialism, as opposed to under Stalinism, reflects an inability to comprehend the historical origins of women's oppression. It also reveals a failure to appreciate the immense possibilities that socialism would open up through the elimination of material scarcity. The revolutionary expropriation of the productive forces and the establishment of a global planned economy would ensure that the most basic conditions for existence—food, shelter, employment, basic healthcare, and education—could be guaranteed for every person on the planet.

Lucy Parker: What is key about Juliet Mitchell's essay is not that she critiques bourgeois feminism's demands, but that she provides a critique of the history of the Left, through various attempts that have arisen to address the problem of women's emancipation. This is perhaps is what makes a good critique: to help clarify the possibilities presented as well as the limitations in any particular idea or moment of political action. The socialist idea was that women's unfreedom is an index of the unfreedom of society as a whole. Socialism was a project attempting to address concrete crises arising in capitalist society. The suggestion is that capitalism is a social problem, not just an economic problem. The development of modern society, and of capitalism (whether or not necessarily) arising out of it, has posed society and its social relations as the problem. The woman's question only really becomes a question through the development of modern society and later, in capitalism. Marx attempted to add specificity to the socialist project, through critiquing it from within. So Marx and Engels's understanding remains key for her in the essay in terms of addressing a woman's position within the production process. But the other constitutive elements that have produced her relatively marginal position, which they suggested through problem of the "family," are for her still not sufficiently elaborated.

In one sense, these appeared as new aspects of social crisis and new concurrent demands regarding reproduction, sexuality, identity, relationships, kinship groups, and child rearing in the 1960s and 1970s. Mitchell is able to therefore address and critique the possibilities and limitations of such demands as they too only address the problem in a partial manner, failing to consider how these aspects are in turn constituted by social relations of production which women also participate in or are excluded from.

Mitchell uses this moment where the questions are being posed, including by feminists, questions which express a real social crisis occurring, as an opportunity, perhaps against the dominant trend, to return to Marx and Engels. She aimed to underscore how they had already recognized that the ways we live our lives in capitalism are in crisis, meaning that these critical questions of sexuality, identity, kinship relations are all there. What it really means to be human is also a question that becomes increasingly contradictory in capitalism. Marx and Engels characterize humanity as unique in its ability to give itself its own species being, not predetermined. But in capitalism it appears that it may have freely created the conditions of its own unfreedom.

The Bolsheviks, within the first few years after the Russian Revolution, made considerable efforts towards women's emancipation and sexual liberation through the immediate legalization of homosexuality, the right to free divorce, and the socialization of housework and childcare. Trotsky describes how these new attempts to transform society came up against the economic limits of the new society and state that had been forged but was still under pressure from all sides as socialist revolution had failed to spread elsewhere. The return of the ideology of the traditional family as the only means to meet the reproduction of this society expressed a continuing

unmet need as capitalism was still to be overcome, but the idea presented a new form of an old unfreedom.

Discontents continue to play out in different ways: sometimes experienced as desire for greater sexual emancipation, sometimes as the freedom to sustain a family life being curtailed, sometimes as the question of women in the job market, or the right to abortion, sometimes as the demand for societal recognition of one's individual differing or changed gender identity, or for one's personal relationships to be recognized as legitimate by the state.

Whether the existing "Left" is able to address these meaningfully is a real question. Marxism itself is often understood merely as a theory of oppression. Class is reduced to an identity category to be "intersected" with others in a hierarchy of oppression and/or privilege, where once, according to Marxism, it meant something a little different: It expressed the historical necessity for society to overcome itself through and beyond capitalism. How we try to understand or grasp demands made in the present on behalf of women's emancipation as a whole is unclear, when the memory of what socialism was trying to achieve becomes increasingly obscure.

Joy McReady: Juliet Mitchell's essay has a very appropriate title, "Women: The Longest Revolution," because man's dominance over women existed before capitalism. It originated in the development of class society and also class antagonisms. Capitalism has entrenched the subservience of women in society, and it rests on private property, which is owning the means of production, and also the family unit, where the new class of workers reproduce themselves and their labor power for free. And although the capitalist mode of production draws an increasing number of women into the labor force, giving them greater economic independence, the family unit has been maintained and keeps women in domestic bondage. So, we talk about the double burden of working outside the home but also doing the majority of the housework within the home and looking after the children.

But at the same time, it also provides an opportunity for women to overthrow these chains. As Engels said, the emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are able to take part in production on a large scale and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. While this doesn't guarantee women's liberation in and of itself, it takes women out of the private and isolated experience and pulls them into a socialized working environment where they can begin to organize with other working women and men in trade unions with wildcat strikes, as part of the working class. It was great to come into Frankfurt and to see the whole way along, "flight cancelled, cancelled..." That's the power of the working class.

Women, like men, are divided into classes. Women of the ruling class can offload a lot of their oppression onto working class women, whether they be nannies or housekeepers or personal assistants. Their privileges will always tie them to a defense of their class before their sex. The idea of the "all class" women's movement promoted by feminists obscures the different class interests, in the fact that they seek solutions within the capitalist system. The working class itself is the class with the chains that can't be broken except by uprooting capitalism. The revolutionary communist position on women's liberation takes as its starting point that working class women are the central agents in the struggle against their own oppression, aided at every step by class-conscious, working-class men. So we won't be "liberated." We liberate ourselves.

Many may be thinking that this is just Marxism 101,

a print run of over 100,000. The Bolsheviks also set up their own women's section.

But in the absence of a mass revolutionary party today, what we should argue for is the right of women and other oppressed groups to caucus. In trade unions and all the different working class organizations, it's really important that they are allowed to meet to discuss any issue related to their oppression and the struggle against sexism or oppressive behavior and should be able to submit proposals for dealing with these issues directly to the membership and the leadership of the organizations. We also need to raise the call for a working class women's movement. This would take up the whole spectrum of women's oppression: domestic violence, rape, discrimination at work, inequalities in pay, and cuts in childcare and healthcare. It would also combat the sexist culture of capitalist society. Really, the historic crisis of capitalism that we are living through right now has impacted working class women very severely. They have been impacted as workers, especially in the public sector where they're often the majority who have seen their jobs, wages, and pensions completely cut and their whole workload increased. They have also been impacted by all the cuts to services and healthcare as well.

No organization is entirely immune from the reactionary ideas and forms of behavior in the society as a whole. Working class organizations, trade unions, and reformist parties don't automatically or spontaneously oppose women's oppression just as they do not spontaneously become socialist. It requires a conscious struggle by a revolutionary party with the right policies and program to fight against sexism, racism, and reformism.

Response

CM: I kind of feel that Juliet Mitchell is a really nice writer, but this work you are citing from is from 1971, when feminism started. There have been decades of feminist theory ever since. When I say there is so much feminist theory that is not read in leftist circles, I am very sad about that. I feel it's not the same the other way around.

Women have profited from alliances with bourgeois women. For example, to get the right to abortion, the vote, or access to universities. All of this is reformist, but I'm kind of happy about it. Working class women have profited from the social, economic, and political capital of bourgeois feminists in these struggles. When you are criticizing feminists who put gender oppression first, I feel that you've used the words "feminists state that..." Precisely what feminists are you talking about?

We also could use a term from gender studies called "intersectionality" of forms of oppression that can help to try and understand what's going on here, and that, for example, gender oppression will not go away with socialism. We see that in history. It's important for me to see that socialism as such will not abolish gender oppression.

Lastly, it's not only about being exploited as women; it's also the oppression of having to be a man or a women.

UJ: What feminists am I talking about? All the ones I know, basically. You might be the exception, but I don't know you that well yet. No, gender oppression is not something that goes away after the revolution immediately. But we will not get real women's liberation without it. Not in this society. Now, you said reforms are not bad. No, they are not. We will certainly defend them. But if you fight only for reforms than you have put a limit to your fight. We will fight for a socialist revolution.

JM: We can unite bourgeois feminists, radical feminists, etc., on certain issues, but as revolutionary

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What is Socialism?

but the theoretical starting point becomes crucial when you start to talk about how to organize women within the revolutionary movement. Juliet Mitchell was very correct when she writes that the second wave of feminism was a reaction to the failure of the Left and other revolutionary movements in the 60s to really challenge sexism within their own ranks and to treat women fighters within the struggle as equals.

Of course, this was even worse in the late 1800s when Clara Zetkin of the German SPD and Alexandra Kollontai of the RSDLP, and later of the Bolsheviks, were organizing. In many countries women weren't allowed to join trade unions or political parties, or to vote, and revolutionary women were fighting for these rights. But they also fought within their political parties to create special organizations and movements of the oppressed within and outside the revolutionary party. They recognized that prejudices and oppressive behavior exist among workers and revolutionary communists and have to be fought. Clara Zetkin argued that women need to be organized and their rights defended. She built up a massive organization of working class women within the SPD. There were about 140,000. She also produced a specific newspaper with

socialists we want to take it to the next level. So let's take the fight for abortion rights that's happening right now. There's a big campaign happening in Ireland, which is huge, and we would definitely participate in that because that is fundamental for women, for their struggle. The problem with the idea that we'll win one reform or another reform is that the capitalists can always roll them back. That's why these two struggles go hand in hand: the class struggle with the women's liberation struggle. It's not that one is subordinate to the other or anything like that but they go hand in hand because the ultimate goal is liberation.

In terms of intersectionality, to me as a socialist, we should not use this theory. As revolutionary socialists, we should really champion any struggle of the oppressed. The thing is that when you use the theory of intersectionality, it focuses on the oppression and not on the agency for change, which is the working class and the class struggle and the socialist struggle. To me that is the crux of the argument. It's not just about checking the box for who is the most oppressed, but it's about the agency for social change.