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Socialism and trans liberation

The following are selected comments from panelists at an April 1 webinar: "Transgender Visibility Day: A Socialist Perspective," sponsored by the Workers World Party, which can be viewed on Workers World YouTube: [tinyurl.com/35944sht](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tinyurl.com/35944sht). WWP comrades Ezra Echo, Devin Cole and Romeo Channer joined Dr. Susan Stryker, author of "Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution"; Jupiter Peraza, an undocumented trans woman, activist, DACA recipient and associate with the Transgender District of San Francisco program; and Indigo Lett, the secretary and social media coordinator for the Gulf Coast transgender activist organization STRIVE.

Trans history, trans borders

Ezra: Can you explain the story of how the trans movement has been built in the United States and some of the struggles that the movement has allied itself with?

Susan: In fact, the trans movement dates back in America to the 1890s. A group was formed in New York City at a place called Columbia Hall, which was a kind of bar, brewery, performance venue, meeting place, sex workers' meeting place and hotel. Then there was a group called Cercle Hermaphrodites in New York that was made up mostly of trans-female people, who called themselves andhroney, and who said they came together for the common defense against the bitter persecutions of the world.

Trans activism really began to emerge as an activist movement of minority identities in the 50s and 60s. In the 50s a magazine called Society for Equality in Dress was published. In the early sixties you start to see people advocating the possibility of changing names in

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legal documents. When the social movements of the 1960s begin, trans people are seen organizing themselves in street politics and participating in radical direct action against police and imprisonment.

I made a movie "Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria," about the trans women in the San Francisco Tenderloin," who spent the night in the coffee shop, a kind of chat area for the whole neighborhood. The police raided regularly, and one night in August 1966 - three years before the most famous Stonewall uprising - the police came in and the queens fought back. As the best contemporary description of the event says, that night a general chaos was assembled in the Tenderloin.



The 'riot' in the Compton cafeteria, San Francisco, 1966.

I think that, especially in the twenty-first century, after September 11, 2001, much of the violence that trans people have faced is state violence that has to do with borders: border crossing and identity documentation and access to social services. Trans people are often brought under the LGBT umbrella, but in a way, I think trans people's problems have less to do with issues of sexual orientation than with issues of citizenship status, who is counted as a member of the body ly.

So trans activism is very much aligned with pro-migrant, pro-asylum, and pro-open borders activism.

Jupiter: As for how the history of the trans movement has been constructed in the U.S., the trans movement has taken a kind of leap as it has joined movements and faces of history. For example, the Industrial Revolution brought people to urban centers, in this geographic location where they were not known to anyone else. Because when you live in a small town, in a small town, everyone knows you; there's this pressure of having to be very conservative and limited in the way you express yourself. In the Industrial Revolution, people flocked to cities and experimented with their expression.

Another example: After the end of World War II, we saw international attention increase on Christine Jorgensen [a former U.S. soldier who underwent sex-reassignment surgery in Denmark in 1951]. His involvement in the war gave a new light and a new attention to the trans movement. And if we go back a few decades to the AIDS epidemic, we also see that trans people are affected and that trans issues are being raised in a new light.

But historically, cisgender heteronormative issues stand out more than trans people. That's something I think trans people have always struggled with. Everything that happens, we really have to draw attention to how it affects transgender people. For example, within the Black Lives Matter movement, with the murder of black trans women, we are now experiencing the cry of "Black trans lives matter!" This is a perfect example of how we can highlight trans struggles in what's happening right now, with police brutality, for example.

I will say that I think we are doing an incredible job in understanding trans issues and strengths and in drawing attention to trans struggles to make this a better society for trans people.

The Trans Struggle for Socialism

Ezra: Why is it critical to fight for socialism to ensure trans liberation?

Romeo: Perhaps a very obvious point is that health care is a human right, and access to health care is especially necessary and urgent for trans people. It's one of the biggest

battles trans people are fighting around the world. If you live in a socialist country, that provides health care to its entire population.

Devin: There can be no socialism without trans liberation, and there can be no trans liberation without socialism. Capitalism and imperialism are designed and created to divide people, even by gender, to build oppression on gender.

Aunque hay gente que cree que la transexualidad no es tan importante en la lucha por el socialismo, ¡es fundamental! El camarada Leslie Feinberg, miembro del Partido Mundo Obrero [Workers World Party] desde hace más de 40 años, expuso intrincada y meticulosamente la conexión de que la opresión de género surgió como parte de la opresión de clase, en su análisis histórico marxista, “Guerreros transgénero”. La lucha por el socialismo es la lucha por la liberación trans, y viceversa.

Susan: Para lograr realmente una sociedad justa, habitable y sostenible que trate a todo el mundo con equidad -donde todo el mundo tenga lo suficiente y nadie tenga demasiado- tenemos que pensar en Estados Unidos en particular, en la dimensión colonial de los colonos, en el hecho de que Estados Unidos está construido sobre mano de obra robada y tierra robada. Para mí, el socialismo es simplemente la creencia, la convicción, de que se puede, de hecho, tener un orden social justo. Y si un sistema de gobierno no aborda eso, sigue siendo colonialismo de colonos.

Indigo: Para mí, el socialismo es comprender lo malo que es el capitalismo. Para la gente de la clase trabajadora, tenemos que entender el punto económico, obviamente, y el punto sobre el racismo, pero también tenemos que entender el punto internacional – entender el papel de Estados Unidos como país y cómo eso afecta a otras personas en otros países. Históricamente hay comunidades de terceras personas en todas partes, y se ven afectadas por el colonialismo y el capitalismo.

Luego, especialmente el año pasado con la pandemia, eso realmente demostró que necesitamos tanto: atención sanitaria, educación y tantas otras cosas. Eso nos lleva obviamente al socialismo. Con la administración que tenemos ahora, básicamente van a intentar devolvernos a donde estaban los Estados Unidos antes de la pandemia, ¡que seguía siendo un lugar muy terrible! Así que creo que para nosotros, es sólo un constante, constante desaprendizaje de nuestros propios comportamientos tóxicos, para seguir

aprendiendo más sobre nosotros mismos y empujar hacia el socialismo de una manera que todos podamos sentirnos bienvenidos y cómodos y vivos.

Romeo: I just want to add that I personally will not feel liberated if the hormones I take are manufactured on stolen Palestinian land, which is where much of hormone replacement therapy comes from. This is just one of many examples of how all these struggles in the world are materially linked. Not just in the way we have to look at structures and deal with structures, but in the actual material physical connection that globalization and capitalism have brought together. Our genre continues to be largely controlled and monitored by these systems of capitalism and imperialism.

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