

Patriarchy

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers Solidarity Movement

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1. Introduction

1. This paper outlines the collectively agreed politics of the WSM on the entire oppressive gender system, herein called 'Patriarchy' but which might be more technically referred to as 'Cis-Hetero-Patriarchy' or 'Cis-Heterosexual-Male Supremacy'.
2. The purpose of this paper is to outline what we think patriarchy is, how it has developed, and what freedom beyond patriarchy would mean.
3. Patriarchy is a highly totalitarian, ancient, system which regulates our lives in the most private, invasive, insidious, and extraordinary ways. That control is exerted throughout society at both the lowest informal personal level, through people we meet in our ordinary daily lives, and at the highest formal political level, through the state, capitalism, and religious institutions.
4. Sexism, transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and intersexism, are joined together in this single oppressive gender system.
5. Feminism is the movement and ideology which seeks to replace patriarchy with an equal and free society. The WSM is a fundamentally feminist organisation.

2. The Rise and Fall of Sex and Gender

1. At the core of patriarchy is that human babies are assigned something called a 'sex' at birth.
2. This is done without the consent of the child.
3. In many societies only two categories are accepted as standard: 'male' and 'female'. There is one marginalised category: 'intersex'.
4. Sex is assigned based on the genitalia of the newborn child. In most cases if the child has a penis, 'he' is called 'male'. If they have a vagina, 'she' is called 'female'. Some intersex children have genitalia that deviate from the norm, both a penis and a vagina for example, but not limited to this. The doctor, or other, decides whether they will be called 'male' or 'female'.
5. For most of human history the difficulty in controlling fertility and the strong relationship between work and physical strength made gender categorisation a fundamental aspect of all societies. Quite often there were more than 2 genders but always most people were clearly categorised as being either men or women and this often had a huge impact on what role in society they could play. In particular in the aftermath of the agricultural revolution class systems developed where many legal aspects from inheritance to the degree of personal independence allowed were strongly tied to assigned gender — very often women were literally made the property of men. In less authoritarian societies there were routes where people could escape their gender assignment but that was seldom easy. In other societies attempts to do so resulted in violence and perhaps death.

6. Today we live in a society where it's completely possible to control fertility through a wide variety of technologies — childbirth can be a choice. It is also one where industrialisation and automation means physical strength is increasingly irrelevant for labour. We have however inherited that older system which sees gender, and in particular a binary gender distinction, as something completely fundamental in a way that hair colour or height is not viewed.
7. It may continue to be a scientific fact that genitalia differ but there is nothing scientific in insisting that this difference — which is seldom actually visible — should define every aspect of our lives from cradle to grave. Blue toys for boys and pink toys for girls is not science, neither is the idea that toys can only come in one of two colours.
8. Faced with this modern reality we see on the one hand a doubling down in the attempts to impose a rigid gender division by the old institutions, in particular the catholic church.
9. On the other hand technology and the general advance of the struggle for freedom has opened up a space in many societies where a broad revolt against that rigid binary gender segregation has exploded. Increasing numbers are openly rejecting the gender they were assigned at birth. But also even an overwhelming majority of those assigned female at birth would deny that assignment should have any influence on where and how they can work, socialise, etc. From the perspective of life determination the broad revolt against the gender binary is something that already involves the majority.

3. Abolishing Patriarchy

1. Patriarchy is supported and spread by capitalism and the state. Therefore it is necessary to tie the struggle against patriarchy to the struggle against capital and state.
2. We must seek unity within the working class across divides of gender and sexuality, as we ultimately have more in common than not. However, it is vital not to assume that just because we are all working class that we are automatically equal.
3. While gender has its root in an arbitrary correspondence between anatomy and other personal traits, the aim is to eliminate the coercion behind gender and not necessarily to entirely eliminate the idea of gender itself. That is to say a society liberated from patriarchy is one where gender, including sexual orientation, is freely expressed and doesn't carry any privileges or penalties. However, at that point gender would likely fade into obscurity.
4. As both women's and queer / LGBTQIA liberation are ultimately products of the same oppressive gender system, we strive to build a movement where women and queers join in a common struggle for freedom from patriarchy.

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Position paper on Patriarchy as collectively agreed by the July 2017 National Conference. Note this sits underneath the Anarchism, Oppression, & Exploitation position paper.

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