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RECLAIM THE NIGHT



Women and their supporters have been taking to the streets across the UK demanding an end to gendered violence. The above image shows material produced for last weeks Reclaim the Night in Brighton.

This evenings Reclaim The Night march aims to raise awareness of the impact of street harassment and gender violence. It is part of the campaign for The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence.

The Solidarity Federation are supporting tonight's march and the campaign to end all forms of violence and to make our streets a safe place for everyone. Day or night - we are marching to demand the "right to be free from the fear and reality of rape, street harassment, stalking and all other gender violence". Reclaim the Night has an international history stretching back to the 70s. The first march took place in Belgium in 1976. In the USA the first 'Take Back The Night' march was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in October 1975, after the murder of a microbiologist, Susan Alexander Speeth, who was stabbed to death while walking home alone.

Harassment, sexual violence and rape are still with us. That is why we are marching. Victim blaming, rape apologism, rape culture, harassment and violence must be stamped out.

It is everyone's responsibility to create a society where women are safe to move around our communities without fear of attack. The police or judicial system don't keep people safe: people do. Its up to all of us.



Reclaim the Night
A Sex Worker Speaks Out



Laura Lee, an independent escort based in Glasgow, sex workers' rights activist and member of Sex Workers Alliance Ireland spoke to the Leveller about what Reclaim the Night means for sex workers in Northern Ireland. Above Laura gives an interview at the Stormont protest against clause 6 of the Human Trafficking Bill on 20th October. Masked sex workers and members of the Belfast Local of SolFed were present at the protest opposing the clause which will further drive sex work underground making sex workers in NI more vulnerable to attack.

Now more than ever, Reclaim the Night is an important statement for sex workers to make. The recent decision of Stormont to put sex workers in further danger is insane as it means we are still not permitted to work together for safety. Further, they are "decriminalising" street sex work and given that we are in a recession and approaching Christmas, I predict an increase in the number of street sex workers, in Belfast and other major cities.

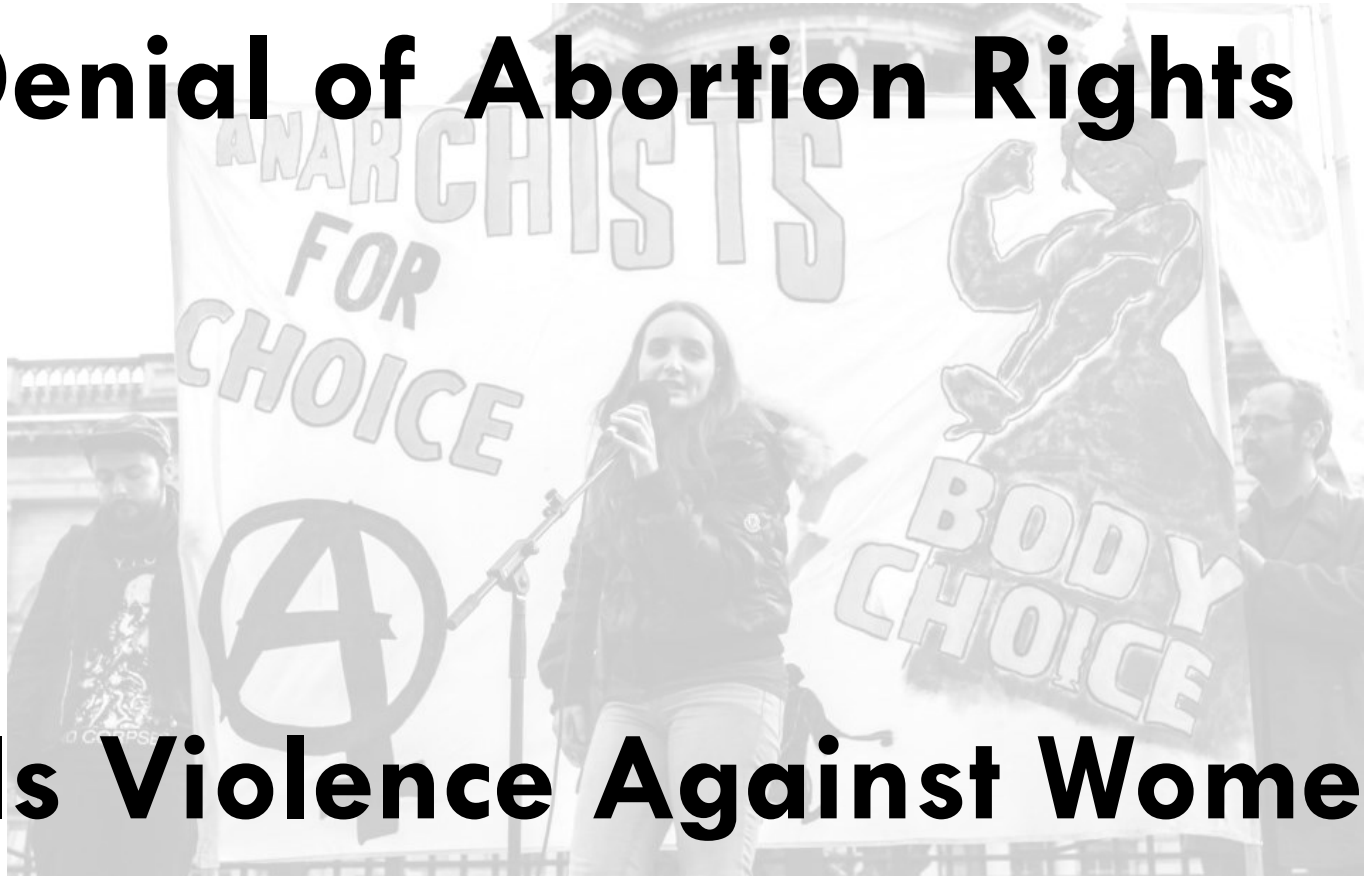
Street sex work is dangerous in itself, we know that because the implementation of the Merseyside model in Liverpool has proven what positive policing can do. There they treat sex workers as victims of hate crime, as with any other minority group. The police work with the women, not against them and it has led to a much better relationship between the two groups. More importantly, it sends out a message that the women are not vulnerable victims and are not alone. The result? The increase in convictions against the perpetrators of crime has shot up by over 80%.

Conversely in Edinburgh, we know that when they took away the tolerance zone, assaults on street sex workers rocketed by 95%. Now, since the closure of some of the saunas and the migration of some of those sex workers back out onto the streets, I've noticed a sharp spike in the number of reports coming from Ugly Mugs re the Edinburgh area. Is that a coincidence? I don't believe so.

For sex workers, Reclaim the Night is about being able to work without fear of threats, stalking, assault and rape. Nearly a decade ago, Gary Ridgway was unmasked as the Green River Killer, the most prolific serial killer in U.S. history. He preyed on runaways and sex workers mainly, and although initial figures suggested 49 victims, it's now thought to stand at 80. Asked why he chose sex workers in particular, he said it was because no-one would miss them. Tell that to their parents and siblings. Tell that to their children.



Denial of Abortion Rights



Is Violence Against Women

Victoria Rose writes about her personal experience of abortion and explains that the lack of women's right to control their own bodies in Ireland, north and south, is gendered violence.

When I was 18 I found out I was pregnant. I called my boyfriend and we decided I would get an abortion, there was no way I could bring a kid into my life, I lived in an apartment complex in Virginia, with my mom and 2 teenage sisters. We were all broke and struggling. I finally convinced my boyfriend to pay for it and I made the arrangements. After my abortion I was sad, but I knew I made the right decision. It was the hardest thing I've ever done, but I knew I couldn't be a mother to a child in my circumstances and the father would have been a huge disappointment as he'd been hiding a serious drug addiction and subsequently died from an overdose a few years ago.

When I moved to Belfast I got birth control as soon as I registered with my GP. I had a conversation with him about my previous history. That was when I found out I didn't have the right to terminate if I became pregnant in this country. I read story after story about the lengths some women have gone to have an abortion because they couldn't get one the legal way. The longer abortion is restricted is the longer it will be something made to feel shame about. I was a grown woman and had the right to choose my life path. Having restrictions on abortion is gendered violence because it attacks a woman's right to choose what to do with their body. When I decided to terminate my pregnancy I worried about many things, like the cost of the procedure and how I'd recover, I was lucky I was able to get one safely.

There are so many women that have hurt themselves or died in the process of terminating because safe options weren't available to them. It's not an easy decision to make and the current laws make it impossible for women to have them legally and safely. Forcing a woman to be a mother against her will shows the lack of respect the people making the laws have for women's rights. All women should have the right to choose for themselves, what is right for their life. Keeping these laws continues to hold women back, keeping women from being equal to men in society. Someone else's supposed morals, values or religious beliefs should not impact my reproductive rights.





17th Dec.
INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS



Join the demo in front of

Belfast City Hall

5.00pm

Wednesday 17th December



SOLIDARITY FEDERATION (IRELAND)



INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

Solidarity Federation are building a new revolutionary union: an organisation of workers which seeks the abolition of capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit worldwide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for those who control and their lackeys; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and the source of privilege. In their place we want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism.

That society can be achieved by working class organisations based on the same principles - revolutionary unions. These are not trade unions concerned only with "bread and butter" issues like pay and conditions. Revolutionary unions are a means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and beyond - which arise from our oppression.

As such we are actively opposed to sectarianism, racism, sexism and homophobia and other tendencies used to divide workers and weaken our struggles for our common interests.

Organising in Locals and across industries we aim to support our members and other workers in struggle where we live and work. Our activities are based on direct action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through participation of the membership.

We are also organised on a regional basis and, in Ireland, we are actively building our union across the island.

We welcome all workers - including the unemployed, retired, stay-home parents and students - who will work within our Aims and Principles and seek to create revolutionary unions to fight the class struggle.

If you are interested in getting involved contact us at:

belfastsolfed@gmail.com