

\The Laura Pidcock Problem: Transphobia in the Wider Movement. :/

I booed Laura Pidcock. At the recent PSC march to Rafael, I was shocked to learn that Pidcock, a known TERF, would be speaking at the event. This shock was only worsened by the fact that this was a closed mic, meaning that she was chosen specifically by PSC. So, this raises the question, did PSC not research her at all when she was permitted to speak, or did they and simply not care about her transphobic history? More importantly, what does this mean to trans comrades in not only the Palestinian liberation movement, but the wider movement as well?

A little background on Pidcock for those who aren't familiar with her: she was an MP in Durham for two years, and served in Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet as a member of the Labour Party. Yes, the very same party that spawned the Labour Women's Declaration (LWD), who make bold faced lies that trans-women are preying on lesbians on dating sites, trans-men are mentally ill lesbians groomed by the educational system and that non-binary people straight up don't exist. While Laura has not associated with the LWD and is no longer a member of the Labour party, she does parrot much of the violent rhetoric LWD spout about trans-people.

Now, Laura is never as bold about her transphobia, preferring to scatter in mentions of sex and gender throughout a few of her articles, but that does not mean that her transphobia is any less violent. She is a heavy promoter of single sex spaces, saying:

"I think that there has to be the enforcement of single-space exemptions for women to heal and recover; and it is absolutely crucial that there are spaces, that there is provision for trans people to also get the help and support they need"

Firstly, she positions trans-women as a threat to cis-women's healing and recovery, sending only one message: trans-women are not equal to cis-women, they are not true women. She does what all bigots do, turning the targets of their hatred into dangerous, strange Others. This separate-but-equal way of thinking pushes that trans-people should have their own provisions separate from their cis counterparts, but funnily enough I have never seen her campaign for trans only spaces, just for trans-people to be excluded from her spaces.

The violence of this thinking manifests in trans-women being excluded from life-saving and life changing resources like homeless and domestic violence shelters. Just like Jennifer Gale, a woman who died on the street after being denied access to a women's homeless shelter by Salvation Army.

The threat of trans-women in women's spaces can only be a thin smokes-screen to veil the real messaging behind it, because if you think about single-sex spaces for more than five minutes the concept itself falls apart. Would men be allowed because they have a vagina? Would cis-women with beards due to PCOS be excluded? Is the suffering of trans-women who are at danger on the street or in men's spaces not enough to allow them an ounce of safety? Like Leslie Feinberg said:

"...who is pure enough to decide who's woman enough?"

Additionally, on X the everything app, she is very vocally against disrupting transphobic groups like 'FiLiA' and their events because she says it is attacking and silencing women. Which is ironic, as groups who do this, such as 'Bash Back', adopt tactics similar to that of Palestine Action, who use violence and property damage in order to further their goals, yet the former face far more scrutiny by her.

All of this information is widely available, accessible from one or two google searches. So why was boo-ing Pidcock so shocking and controversial, to PSC especially?

There was a mix of reactions: some people asked what a TERF was, some told us to shut up, but more overwhelmingly we were surrounded, grabbed at, filmed, and were made very clear by PSC, Pidcock's mum and Ben Sellers (Pidcock's most loyal foot soldier), that our critique and concerns were not welcome.

Another thing made very clear by these reactions was that there seems to be a clear dissonance between trans issues/liberation and the Palestinian liberation effort for many people. For example, I was asked, in regards to my boo-ing: 'what would the Palestinian people think of this?' I say here what I said to him— what about transgender Palestinians? What about transgender Palestinians who are unable to access proper healthcare and HRT? What about the trans Palestinians who are targeted, entrapped and blackmailed by the IOF because of their identity? What about the thousands upon thousands of trans and queer Palestinians who have died because of Israel's ethnic cleansing of the Gaza strip? Do they not deserve better than to have a transphobe, someone who would further deny them the right to their identity, speak for them? One struggle, One fight: trans liberation and Palestinian liberation.

Pidcock also continuously tried to take us away from the main crowd of people to speak with us, which we refused. The reason why transphobia runs so rampant through leftist spaces is because it is constantly positioned as something to be discussed. Racism, anti-semitism, misogyny are to be violently and immediately excoriated from the movement, but transphobia is to be entered into a debate with. Trans people are constantly told that they must enter into these discourses with those who see our existence as a threat to cis people at our own expense. We must sanitise ourselves for their comfort, we must silence ourselves to let them speak, and we must be lectured at about how we feel and the things we know are wrong by them, all at our own expense.

After the event, PSC then made a post about the whole incident but decided to conveniently leave out the very reason why we challenged Pidcock's platforming in the first place. It was a piss-poor attempt to twist the narrative to turn us into violent aggressors— dangerous Others —who were attacking this poor, defenseless woman just to be divisive. It also was clearly an attempt to dissuade any criticism that may be put their way for inviting a TERF on their super exclusive list of speakers. They were made aware of her transphobia and chose to exclude it from their account because it shows that PSC will never actually dissuade transphobia in their organisation, let alone openly condemn it.

So, what does this mean for trans people who are in these spaces or spaces like them? What position are we left in, and how do we navigate the rife transphobia?

Below I pass the rest of this discussion onto my comrade, who will touch on a few of the ideas I've introduced more deeply and speak on that final question I raised.

This discussion will be divided into three main sections:

1. "This is for Palestine!"
2. "Protection" of cisgender women and "balancing" cisgender and transgender rights
3. The left's response

I have been thinking for a while about the Left's interaction towards queer people, but ultimately I was motivated to write about this by the event and the fallout of the PSC rally. As this year has

progressed, I have been working myself through *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique* by Mario Mieli. I think that many things he wrote about, while he tended to focus on gay men, is relevant to our current conjuncture and the treatment of transgender people.

1. **“This is for Palestine!”**

This phrase was said to the hecklers who took issue with a transphobic politician, Laura Pidcock, being invited to speak at a rally. The hecklers shouted when her name was mentioned and were surrounded by different people all saying, basically, the same thing: “This is for Palestine, not for you, be quiet and accept who is speaking.” We see how Queer issues are sidelined and reduced to a secondary issue, a less pressing issue, an unimportant issue. Yet, this ignores a crucial element to freedom and obscures the diversity of Palestinians. This section is divided into part A and part B to explore both chains of thoughts.

A. Freedom

Mieli discusses the homosexuality struggle and a little bit about ‘transvestite’¹ struggle, but his discussion of freedom is incredibly important to the current day. Therefore, I ask the reader to read Meili and try to translate his discussion of the homosexual man’s freedom into the context of the freedom for our transgender comrades.

Mieli states that until the heterosexual subject can freely desire the homosexual subject, the heterosexual is not free.² Without the ability to freely desire the homosexual subject, to freely be able to imagine a relationship, fear and anguish still exists for the heterosexual subject. The fear and anguish experienced by the heterosexual subject inhibits the freedom of the homosexual subject as the homosexual now has to navigate the world knowing that the heterosexual hates or fears them. Thus, the freedom between heterosexual and homosexual subjects are deeply intertwined.

Freedom becomes intertwined with other subjects’ freedom because of freedom’s nature. Meili argues that freedom is a relation of reciprocity³ therefore, if someone does not have freedom then no one does. It is not enough that gay marriage exists within the UK or gay people are, supposedly, no longer being called slurs in the streets or at the rallies, because until the heterosexual subject frees themselves from the hetero-patriarchal mind, freedom cannot exist.

If only one group hold this “freedom” it’s more of privilege than freedom, and privileges can be revoked. Privileges are not useful politically; what good is it that someone hoards wealth when my neighbour can barely scrape by? What good is it that I live in a house when my neighbour sleeps rough on the street? The house I live in is a privilege and it can be revoked if I am no longer useful to capitalism. What good does it do that I am trans when the thought brings you such fear that you wish to undress me to examine what genitals I have?

Therefore, the phrase shouted at the hecklers, “This is for Palestine” ignores the reality that freedom is a relationship, we cannot have the freedom of Palestinians without the freedom of the Queers. As struggles for emancipation, are interconnected. Any attempt to separate them apart from one another is a failing of the true nature of freedom. Thus, to host transphobic politicians only slows down our quest for true freedom.

B. Palestinians as a closed identity

¹ The word used by Meili

² Meili; *Towards a Gay Communism*

³ Meili; *Towards a Gay Communism*

Silencing the hecklers with the phrase “This is for Palestine” reiterates an image of what a Palestinian is. It denies the existence of queer Palestinians and their struggle because the purpose of the rally proposes a singular view on what identifies a Palestinian could hold. This view reduces ‘Palestinian’ to a singular, closed identity devoid of other social positions such as queerness. Palestinians become a singular innocent victim devoid of gender and sexuality that is against the cisgender heterosexual norms. So this statement “This is for Palestine” not only reduces Palestinians as a closed identity but erases the struggle of Queer Palestinians.

This erasure of Queer Palestinians is dangerous and ignores the intersection of Queerness while living under occupation. For example, the IOF⁴ has weaponised queerness against Queer Palestinians in an attempt to blackmail them into coercion. The IOF have been known to surveil the lives of Queer Palestinians and threaten to out them if they do not bend to the IOF’s will. The IOF will exploit queerness just as they exploit access to healthcare and safety in an attempt to gain control over Palestinians.⁵ alQaws states that Queerness must be discussed side-by-side to other struggles Palestinians face, as singling out sexuality as a singular issue can reinforce pinkwashing and the idea that Palestine is inherently homophobic.⁶ Thus, it is important to note that when discussing the IOF’s abuse of Queer Palestinians their abuse exists alongside other struggles such as, settlers destroying Palestinian houses, lack of access to healthcare, etc. Therefore, just as we discuss the Palestinian struggle against imperial expansion that manifests in land being stripped away, we must acknowledge how the IOF exploits housing, healthcare, safety and queerness in a bid to control Palestinians.

Therefore, to allow an ex-labour politician who exploits and wields dogwhistles against transgender people to talk at a rally in solidarity with Palestinians is an absolute failing. Without the freedom of Queer people there cannot be the freedom of Palestinians. An ex-politician who so willingly perpetuates the exclusion of queerness, specifically the existence and safety of transgender women, is no friend of any movement as they will eventually attempt to exploit other prejudices in an attempt to control the movement for their benefit. Freedom for all is necessary if you want your freedom. All our struggles are interconnected and should not be isolated from each other. Thus, we must make sure that anyone who wishes to be involved must support us all. As if one group is excluded the movement will fail to be truly emancipatory. No transphobes at any more rallies.

2. ‘Protecting’ cisgender women and ‘balancing’ transgender rights with cisgender rights.

Laura Pidcock often claims her comments are about protecting cisgender women and balancing transgender rights with cisgender women’s rights. While Pidcock hasn’t outright said trans women are dangerous,⁷ that sentiment underlines her words each time she emphasises that single sex spaces, spaces which segregate transgender women from cisgender women, are a necessity. Furthermore, this sentiment presents itself as a new morality, a morality which aims to protect and shame queer people, specifically transgender women, but in reality, it is an old morality attempting to wear the skin of a new morality. This old morality, according to Meili is a rehash of the anti-homosexuality taboo.⁸ To elaborate, the wording of protection of women was used against lesbians.

⁴ Israel Offensive Force also known as the Israel Defence Force

⁵ <https://www.dropsitenews.com/p/how-israels-elite-intelligence-unit>

⁶ <https://www.alqaws.org/articles/alQaws-Statement-re-media-response-to-Israels-blackmailing-of-gay-Palestinians>

⁷ See the section above written by my comrade for more information

⁸ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

Heterosexual women had to be protected against the violent, predatory lesbian,⁹ and in modern day we see the same language utilised and directed at transgender women.

So why does this language about 'protection' arise from cisgender feminists? The notion of protection is utilised in an attempt to guilt trip transgender women¹⁰ for looking like the women-object. The cisgender feminists dislike that other people, be it transgender women or feminine gay men, can look (how they perceive it) to be the women-object.

Yet, why specifically do transgender people, in this case transgender women, evoke this reaction? The transgender subject evokes many different reactions such as:

1. Anger
2. Disgust
3. Irritation
4. Scandal
5. Laughter

These reactions happen because the transgender subject reveals the absurdity of themselves (cisgender subject) and the absurdity of the polarity of sexes (man/women and female/male). Anxiety is switched on for the "normal" subject as the rigid opposite of sexes are revealed as absurd.¹¹ To demonstrate, single sex spaces (be it toilets, homeless shelters or refuge centres) create an image of what the women survivor has been through and looks like. They are cisgender and have been the victim of a penis. This image completely ignores that survivors that have not been the victim of a penis. Moreover, the image plays into the rigidity of sex and reduces everyone who needs to access these sites as a Vagina who is victimised to a Penis. Therefore, when a transgender subject (often transgender women) needs to access these spaces the narrative that is structured upon the rigidity of sex is shattered. Excuses are made which often look like:

- OUR victims are more at risk
- OUR victims are more delicate
- OUR victims are just not like THEM

It does not matter if these excuses are false and if they are incompatible with the material reality. The absurdity in the rigidity of sex is broken thus, excuses are made to try and glue back the falsity that sex is rigid.

A penis does not make someone inherently violent nor does a vagina make someone inherently weak but the way single sex spaces are discussed would have you believing that is the case. Thus, a transgender subject (regardless of what genitals they do possess) disrupts the narrative that penis = bad/violent and vagina = good/victim because they prove the absurdity in sex. The absurdity is a scary reality so the normal subject responds through laughter, anger, disgust, scandal or irritation.

3. The Left's response

In the left's mind they believe that they are the protectors of the deviant and their protection is vital. Yet, this protection comes with clauses and conditions and is often used for control. Moreover, this

⁹ "Diversity Within": The Problems with "Intersectional" White Feminism in Practice, Christoffersen and Emejulu

¹⁰ (Meili mentions feminine gay men as well)

¹¹ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

so called protection allows them to present themselves as better, as heroes, as saviours.¹² For example, a chauvanist socialist on the PSC call-out post dons himself in the skin of a protector. The protector of Pidcock, a woman traumatised by the abuse she faced at a rally. The abuse? A few boos and being called a terf. Either way, this man personally spoke for her and advocated for her right to be platformed with no pushback for her transphobic statements. This man becomes Pidcock's protector to allow her to speak for HER women. Meili mentioned how this was seen during his organising days where in response to the struggle of the homosexual, the left suddenly found women who were able to speak for THEIR women.¹³

This protector role that the left dresses themselves as extends to queer people under the legacy claim that the left stopped fascism.¹⁴ The left will be nicer to us than the right who scream and shout about our death. So queers who are involved accept the space that the left have so graciously carved out for them. This space could look like, a speech at their rally, an article in their newspaper or simply be allowed to exist with them where we won't immediately get screamed at. These spaces are just strings tied to our wrists and ankles so that we dance like puppets and become foot soldiers that they can deploy on a whim. When we Queers appeal to their rules we create a prison of our own.¹⁵ If we dare to break free or even push back the consequences are swung around like a hammer ready to slam on our heads when our deviance becomes too much. This is perfectly conveyed with the PSC's rally and their protection of Pidcock. The Queers who attended the PSC rally were allowed to be there but we were expected to be orderly when faced with someone (Pidcock) who wishes we would disappear out of existence. Pidcock does not actively call for our death but would like us transgenders to fade into silence. For the Left, it's okay because Pidcock, for now, does not scream for our death. However, PSC did not predict that a group would cause a fuss, a few heckles, a few boos was enough to challenge PSC's authority. In response Pidcock's posse surrounded and grabbed at the group. A few days later PSC released a post in attempt to slam the threat of consequences onto those Queers' heads. The post was an attempt to humiliate and silence the disobedient fags into submission but they did not expect further disobedience. A post was made in response, detailing transphobic statements Pidcock has said throughout her career. This post did not adhere to the rules that PSC had set, the prison wasn't made for the group because they did not feel the need to bend to the threats of the left, the threats of PSC.

In PSC's posts there were many comments pushing back against the PSC'S post yet what I found interesting was how some admitted they joined in booing at the rally but not as loud as the initial group of hecklers. Partly because they felt they did not know as much as they should have. They appealed to the rules PSC had made and in effect placed handcuffs on themselves. Yet as Meili says "Paternalism and appeal to the democratic pretensions of the groups can only construct a new ghetto"¹⁶ so I would encourage any queers to think, am I being quiet because I want to? Or am I being quiet because I have constructed a prison for myself?

Appealing to the left's rules, to the rules and spaces carved out for us is just a construction of our own prison, our own misery. There is no point in us queers appealing to the heterosexual left because:

¹² Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

¹³ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

¹⁴ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

¹⁵ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

¹⁶ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

- It only hurts us as we have constructed a new prison for ourselves,¹⁷ fearing the heterosexual left who wield threats if we do not comply.
- As mentioned in section 1a) PSC fundamentally did not understand how freedom works so treats transgender struggles as secondary.
- The reactions they demonstrate (anger, irritation, disgust etc) and who they engage with (Pidcock) conveys that they have not grappled with the absurdity of their rigid existence in sexual categories and can only respond in fear.

I hope I have conveyed in all three sections that PSC's reaction demonstrate a complete lack of willingness to meaningfully engage with queer struggles whether this is ignoring Queer struggles or parroting transphobic narratives. Those who engage with us Queers like this will not support us when it matters

As Meili says "My Homosexuality is your homosexuality."¹⁸

I say, "my genderfuck is your genderfuck, are you scared yet?"

¹⁷ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism

¹⁸ Meili; Towards a Gay Communism