

I am home, working at my computer.
I can hear Minnie Bruce's keyboard

clicking and clacking nearby as she puts the finishing touches on an epic poem.

As I reach the conclusion of this book, I am facing another springtime of travel. It is 1998. But the majority of my life is not spent at a podium, invited by people who respect my work. Instead, when I'm out in public, I spend far too much of my precious time and energy trying to find a safe public toilet, or negotiating my way past groups of hostile people who block my path. I spend a lot of time at the gym trying to work off the tension of being stared at — glared at — wherever I go. But I am considered an unwelcome intruder in either the women's or the men's dressing room in the health club.

Most days I feel very isolated — marginalized most places I go. Really, the only places in the world where I fit are the spaces that have been liberated by political struggles. That's what makes it possible for me to speak to students and faculty at universities and colleges, youth groups, community organizations, rallies, and demonstrations. A big chunk of my life is spent editing a weekly socialist newspaper, attending meetings, organizing Deaf and disabled accessibility for rallies, doing group childcare so that parent activists can attend protests, seal-

ing envelopes, faxing press releases, and leafleting at subway stops.

I spend much of my life doing volunteer grassroots organizing because I believe this is the way to win fundamental and lasting change for everyone, including myself, whose life is constricted or injured or disrespected by the system we live under.

Change. Most of us yearn for it. What kind of change do you want? What kind of change is trans liberation fighting for?

What are the goals of the trans movement?

It depends on who you ask. When a movement first begins to surge, many people from all walks of life who share that oppression rise up together and want to put forward one strong demand. But as the movement develops, many divergent ideas are voiced.

How could it be otherwise? I've sat in sleazy diners in the middle of the night listening to homeless teenage drag queens rage against the cops who beat them mercilessly and then demand sex, and against the system that won't cut them a single break. I've sat in conferences with cross-dressers who own banks and railroads, hold high-level government offices, and run television studios. What demands can all these trans people agree on? What definition of liberation? At what points will their political paths diverge?

Some of our issues are so sharply defined and clear we'd be hard pressed to debate them. For example, no matter how you identify yourself, I'm sure you and I agree the devaluation of trans lives must end. No one should be chased down the street or beaten bloody because of what they're wearing or how they define or present themselves. No one should be out of work, paid lower wages, or arbitrarily fired because of their identity. No one who is ill or injured should be turned away from medical care.

Should we stop there? I know I can't.

I feel the necessity to fight for the rights of transsexual men and women to respectful and affordable medical care, and to defend the right of intersexual people to make their own informed decisions about their own bodies. I stand up for every individual's right to their expression of gender, free from criticism or condemnation.

Trans people — everyone in fact — have a right to safe, sanitary, single-occupancy toilets. All trans people deserve identification papers that reflect our lives respectfully. Trans youths have a right to a home and an education; trans elders deserve sensitive care; trans prisoners need defense against prison officials who allow and encourage others to gang rape them.

If you do not identify as a trans person, you can make a significant contribution to our movement. I know many people who do not experience the oppression directly feel diminished and degraded by how trans people are treated. Thousands of people have told me, in conversations, e-mail, letters, and telephone calls, about the pain they felt in the pit of their stomach when a drag queen or transsexual or butch female was verbally harassed in public.

"I didn't know what to do," is what I hear most often. "I didn't want to embarrass the person or call more attention to them. What should I do the next time?" This is frequently the response of a caring, good-hearted person who was caught in a situation that they were never socially prepared for. Each of these people left the situation feeling shaken, emotionally raw, and powerless.

The answer is: There is no formula. There is only this guideline: What would you want a sympathetic stranger to do if you were in a similar situation? It's not easy to deflect the lightning

bolts of hate and ridicule directed at one person toward yourself. It's not easy for anyone to stand up to a bully or bullies. You may stand completely alone with that trans person. Or that trans person, caught in the snare of public humiliation, may not even acknowledge your support.

But you may surprise yourself, too. You may tap into that seam of rocky courage that made you the honest, sensitive person you are today. You may inspire other strangers, temporarily silenced by fear, to speak up.

There are other fronts to this fight. Someone on the job might spark a confrontation, for example, because a transsexual coworker, who is transitioning from male-to-female, is using the women's bathroom. If you were in that situation, what you would want a coworker to do for you? You can offer to escort her to the bathroom, so everyone sees you are not buying into the fear being whipped up. You can dispel anxiety that transsexual women pose any danger to another woman. You can face down the loudest bigots, knowing that if trans-phobia goes unchallenged, sexism and anti-lesbian, gay, and bi prejudices will intensify, too.

Each friend and coworker and neighbor and family member you tell about your actions will be more prepared for the moment they defend a trans person. And you may discover that some of them had — or have — trans friends and lovers, but didn't know that you were an open enough person to be confided in. Our loved ones need every iota of support and solidarity that we as trans people do.

You may still leave these confrontations feeling rattled and raw. I know I do. But one thing is sure: You won't feel powerless. You will grow as a person who has come to grips with the fact that the way you are a woman or a man is one way to be, not the only way to

be. You will have learned to spot bigotry in another cloaked form. Your pride and confidence in yourself will grow. And you will be a treasured ally.

So, what are the goals of trans liberation? There is not one single answer. If you ask me, the aim should not fall a yard short of genuine social and economic liberation for everyone. How to build a movement capable of achieving that objective, however, is the crux of the matter at hand.

Confronting all forms of gender-phobia and trans-phobia are very important to me. But I have worked hard all my life and have almost nothing to show for it. In large part because I am a visibly-identified trans person, I've had low-paying jobs that offer no pension and pay a pittance into Social Security. How will I survive as a blue-collar trans elder? I have to literally scrape together hundreds of dollars every month on health insurance. The urgent need for *affordable* health care is just as real for me as the need to tear down the brick walls of bigotry that block my access. Rent devours a bigger chunk of my income every year.

And I face many other struggles. For example, my partner and I have very few rights as a same-sex couple. I am female in a woman-hating society. And I am regularly confronted with anti-Semitism. The oppressions I battle are layered, and all weigh heavily on me.

We're still in the beginning stages of the trans movement. And so the question of what will be the consciousness of this movement is still up for grabs. How this question is settled will have long-term ramifications. Are we simply attempting to win legislative victories? As important as these reforms are, they do not address the root causes of trans oppression.

The majority of trans people suffer from police harassment,

assault, racism, sexism, high unemployment, low wages, job insecurity, homelessness, lack of health care, and high rents. The problem for trans people isn't just backward attitudes, it's the system. It's an economic system that is profit-driven – valuing only the bottom line – so people's needs always come last. This Robin-Hood-in-reverse system robs the poor to enrich a tiny fraction of the population. Yet that small wealthy class has learned in a highly refined way that the success to maintaining its rule is to split up the majority, make us point our fingers at one another, focus our anger at each other.

Our trans movement is getting stronger because we're fighting. But the progress that we've made is fragile. History teaches us that when an economic crisis hits, the process of scapegoating becomes more intense and more violent. African-American, Latino, Asian, and Arab peoples, lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, feminists, trans people – and others who have been in the forefront of progress – will increasingly find themselves in the crosshairs. And the gains we made will all be under siege, as well.

To safeguard what we've won and to move forward requires securing, solidifying, and making more permanent alliances with others who are hurt by the same system. Consciousness plays an important role in cementing this coalition. Shared consciousness becomes a material force because what you're fighting for and what you are determined to win together has a big impact on how your foes react to you.

For example, if in the course of the Vietnam war the U.S. anti-war movement had only demanded negotiations, that would have been defined as the outer limit of the debate in this country.

But the consciousness of all the Vietnamese who were fighting

the seemingly overwhelming Pentagon forces was that they weren't going to give up. They were going to fight to the death for their freedom. This determination of the Vietnamese had a profound impact on the consciousness of people in the United States. The growing consciousness here became: We don't want one more person to die!

The resolve of the Vietnamese and its effect on anti-war consciousness in the United States had a deep and pervasive impact on those who had the most to gain and the least to lose by refusing to fight – U.S. soldiers. By 1971, one out of four of all U.S. military soldiers worldwide – not just those in Vietnam – had either gone AWOL or deserted. And many other soldiers – individually and as groups – actively resisted the war in Vietnam, refused to put down rebellions in inner cities in the United States, held sit-down actions, fringed abusive officers, and participated in other acts of rebellion. The might of their combined consciousness made it very hard for the brass to conduct a war.

Or look at the consciousness of impoverished working-class people in the United States during the 1930s. People were so poor during the Depression that they were literally starving to death in the streets. They joined the ranks of massive protests and made it clear they were going to keep fighting until they got some justice. And that social upheaval resulted in the reform package known as the New Deal.

The Social Security Act wasn't passed because people lobbied politicians. It was passed because in cities across the country tens of thousands of unemployed people marched and rallied and waged militant strikes. When the landlords evicted tenants, organizing committees moved them back in; when the electric companies shut

off people's lights and gas, progressive organizers came in and turned them back on. There was a growing radicalization—a rising tide of struggle.

And when people started to fight together in the mid-1930s on issues of economic and social security and the right to unionize, it brought Black/white unity to the fore. People needed each other in order to win their demands. As a result, the number of lynchings in this country plunged precipitously.

The Klan and lynchings were developed as barbarous weapons of counter-revolutionary terror to dismantle the tremendous social victories of African Americans during Black Reconstruction, and later to maintain an apartheid-like police state in the southern half of this country. Between 1866 and 1933 there were some 5,000 recorded lynchings in the United States. The rate reached a horrendous height around the beginning of the economic Depression in 1929.

A sharp and significant decrease in lynchings in this country, however, was around 1933 and 1934, during a period of acute capitalist economic crisis. Those years coincided with the rise of a mass workers' movement that organized African-American and white workers together into the CIO—the Congress of Industrial Organizations. It coincided with the rise of the 1934 general strikes of workers in San Francisco and Toledo and Minneapolis and military factory occupations—known as sit-down strikes—that swept from auto workers, to electric storage battery makers, to hosiery workers.

This ascending workers' movement did not put an end once and for all to lynchings. But it pushed back this and other forms of terror. And the degree to which right-wing violence has surged or

been suppressed since then has depended on the relative strength of the working class in its struggle against the wealthy owning class. When the majority of working people awaken to their own class interests and act together to take collective action, the social equation is dramatically changed in a period of such rising struggle.

Many movements have come before the trans liberation movement: the movement to abolish slavery, women's suffrage, workers' rights, civil rights, gay liberation, anti-Vietnam war, women's liberation, Deaf and disabled liberation. These social movements have had a profound social impact on U.S. life.

Does our trans movement have to start from scratch or can we build on what we've learned from the last 150 years? What lessons can we glean from struggles that preceded ours? What are the best tactics and strategy to win our demands? How can we not only protect our victories, but gain new ground?

And where is the mass movement in the streets that trans liberation can ally itself with? Where is the struggle today that can turn the tide of reaction? Where are the hundreds of thousands in the streets, marching and demanding justice, like the protests of the 1930s that won the right to unionize, to Social Security, to welfare and unemployment insurance, to public housing? Today, Corporate America and its politicians are taking the reforms of the New Deal off the table. Where is the massive, angry response?

Is a mass upsurge possible today? If so, can we make the demands of the trans communities a strong voice within that tide of resistance? Who can we look toward to build such a movement?

All our lives we have been taught that those of us who do the work of the world are not the agents of historical change. Instead, we are told that the only way we can have any impact on the direc-

tion of the economy, or society as a whole, is to vote once every four years for one of two parties that are funded by and beholden to big business.

Since the 1930s, the Republican and Democratic Party have played hard cop, soft cop when it comes to domestic economic policy. The Democratic Party has taken credit for legislative reforms like the New Deal. But do the Democrats really deserve that credit? This is an important question, especially since some in the lesbian, gay, bi, and trans communities look to the Democratic Party as a vehicle of progressive reform. So how the New Deal was won, for example, has meaning for our movement.

Franklin Roosevelt, a Democrat, took office three years after the cataclysmic 1929 capitalist economic crash. His administration presided during a powerful mass upsurge of the working class that threatened to erupt into a general working-class rebellion. The Roosevelt administration was in charge of trying to quell this pre-revolutionary surge. His job was to save capitalism. And the New Deal was meant to do just that. And so the New Deal was a great legislative victory wrested through struggle. Workers won it.

Democrat Lyndon Johnson was similarly forced to make concessions as a result of the great struggles of the 1960s. His administration created new social programs like the "War on Poverty" in order to buy social peace at home, while waging war in Vietnam. These policies, plus the strong war economy, helped isolate young middle-class activists and keep rebellion from sweeping the entire working class.

The Democratic Party cannot lead us forward to trans liberation. They've led us into war and economic austerity: Woodrow Wilson led the United States into World War I; Franklin Roosevelt led the

country into World War II. Truman started the Korean War. John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson began and widened the Vietnam War.

The reactionary drive to slash social services began during the late 1970s, when Democrat Jimmy Carter started draining social services to fuel a \$2 trillion military buildup. And he was the mastermind of the union-busting plan to attack the air traffic controllers — implemented by Reagan in 1981 — that was the opening gun of the current anti-labor offensive.

The process of transferring wealth from working people to the wealthy continued after Reagan. The rate actually accelerated during the first four years of the Clinton Democratic administration.

Whether a Democrat or a Republican presides, both parties administer the same system on behalf of big business. As the trans struggle unfolds, it will become critical to develop an independent movement that can free itself from the grip of "lesser-of-two-evils" politics of waiting to get another Democrat in office.

The truth is, you and I are the stuff that great leaders are made of. We don't have to wait for a distinguished white man on a horse or a politician wealthy enough to win office in a multimillion dollar campaign to usher in justice and equality. The ranks of rebellions and revolutions that have shaped human history have been made up of people like you and me. That history lesson has been purposefully kept from us.

Where is the great social movement in the streets that will help support and strengthen our demand for trans liberation? Will we see it in our lifetimes? No crystal ball exists to predict mass awakening. But laws of motion and development do exist: Repression breeds resistance. That's the lesson of Stonewall.

And remember what Sylvia Rivera said about that rebellion? "I

always believed that we would have a fight back. I just didn't know it would be that night."

When I was growing up in the 1950s, the right-wing repression was ferocious. Working-class families like my own went about our lives, going to work, going to school, paying the bills, feeding the cat. We couldn't see the momentous struggles of the 1960s on the horizon. We didn't realize that the repression was making it impossible not to struggle, not to fight back.

Of all the periods of human history, I am excited to live in this particular epoch. In just five decades, I have witnessed technology outstrip anything I saw as a child in a Buck Rogers movie, or anything I read by Jules Verne – Mars probes, Pentium chips, laser microsurgery. Yet sweatshop conditions today – in this country and around the world – are reminiscent of the nineteenth century exploitation of labor that I read about as a child in Charles Dickens's novels. It is this contradiction that creates the material basis for the inevitable rise of an independent, anti-capitalist movement by the working class.

Will trans people be in the front ranks of these battles? Of course we will be. Wherever oppression has existed, we have been at the forefront of struggles.

History has recorded the names of many trans warriors. We all grew up hearing about Joan of Arc, for example. Few of us, though, were taught that she was a masculine, cross-dressing female. Joan of Arc was an illiterate, peasant teenager. She became a brilliant leader of a peasant army because she was able to rise to the demands of the historical moment in which she lived.

So did the cross-dressed leaders of urban rebellions like "Captain" Alice Clark, a cross-dressed female who led a crowd of women

and cross-dressed males in England in 1629 in an uprising over the high cost of grain. So did Rebecca and her Daughters – peasant guerrilla armies that shaped Welsh history by fighting British occupation in the nineteenth century. So did Louisa Capetillo, the Puerto Rican cross-dresser and socialist feminist who led tobacco workers in battles against their bosses in the early twentieth century. So did Magnus Hirschfeld, a Jewish, gay, feminine, socialist leader at the turn of the twentieth century who led a movement for the rights of trans people and same-sex love in Germany. So did Marsha Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, impoverished drag queens who fought the cops at the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969.

The irony is that many of those trans leaders did not fight only for civil rights for transgender, transsexual, intersexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. They fought colonization, unjust wars, hunger, privatization of land, gouging taxation, repression by the police and military, homelessness, and economic exploitation. They fought for the rights of everyone who was tyrannized and downtrodden.

We remember their names for the same reason we remember Nat Turner's and Sojourner Truth's and John Brown's – because they fought back, even when the economic and social system that oppressed them seemed invincible. Imagine how during the nineteenth century in the United States it must have seemed as though slavery could last forever. There was no mass movement. They didn't have millions of followers. But Nat Turner, Sojourner Truth, and John Brown fought back anyway. In doing so, they became *catalysts* to the movement to abolish slavery.

The people who make a difference in history are those who fight for freedom – not because they're guaranteed to succeed – but

because it's the right thing to do. And that's the kind of fighters that history demands today. Not those who worship the accomplished fact. Not those who can only believe in what is visible today. But instead, people of conscience who dedicate their lives to what needs to be won, and what can be won.

I am confident that you and I will find each other, shoulder-to-shoulder, in that historic struggle.