

# from gay rights to queer liberation

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## Socialists Stand for LGBTQ Equality and Liberation

Socialists support the extension of democracy into every arena of society. As such, we believe in maximizing self-determination—with regard to your body, your sexuality, and all aspects of your personal life—and in creating the material conditions that enable all individuals to freely express and act on their desires.

we're here.  
we're queer.  
we're democratic  
socialists

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## Liberal Policies Do Not Go Far Enough

As socialists, we believe in challenging sexuality- and gender-based domination wherever it occurs in our society. For instance, we support laws that protect sexual minorities from discrimination in employment and housing. But a liberal politics of “LGBT rights” does not address the root causes of homophobia and transphobia, nor does it begin to address the needs and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of LGBTQ individuals. All too often, liberal policies only appear to support our LGBTQ communities, while in truth, they do material harm to working-class people of all gender and sexual identities. While, for example, we can celebrate the achievement of marriage equality in the United

democratic socialists of america

States, this symbolic victory has limited important social benefits to married individuals who are citizens. As socialists, we fight to extend these benefits to all kinds of “families” and domestic arrangements, including those that are not recognized and sanctioned by the state.



### **Socialists Provide A Queer Working-Class Perspective**

The fact is that the overwhelming majority of LGBTQ people are working class, and that our struggle is the struggle to create a sustainable and just economy that is organized on a democratic basis. Socialists recognize that LGBTQ issues are, to a great extent, the same as those of all working class people - inadequate housing, the unavailability of good-paying jobs, meager social insurance and welfare provision, unaffordable healthcare, crushing debt, substandard education, a punitive criminal justice and carceral system, and police brutality. At the same time, we acknowledge that certain issues disproportionately affect LGBTQ people, in many cases further compounding their economic marginalization and hardship. Such issues include: homelessness, particularly among LGBTQ youth; discrimination in employment and housing; unmet needs for individuals living with HIV/AIDS; and targeted

police violence. The persistence of these problems points to the inhumanity of capitalism and to its particularly devastating effects on LGBTQ people of all colors.



### **Our Leaders Have Failed Us**

The self-appointed “leaders” of the LGBTQ movement in the United States, meanwhile, have pushed an agenda that does little to nothing for working class people of all backgrounds. They have prioritized a politics of representation that simply elevates a few prominent figures into the ruling class. They have adhered to a politics of respectability that upholds a right-wing idea of “family values” and de-sexualizes LGBTQ individuals. They have engaged in “pinkwashing” - that is, enabling the American military state to manipulate and utilize “gay issues” in the service of Islamophobic foreign policy discourse, regime-change adventurism, and armaments production. They have poured all of their supporters’ resources into the fight for marriage equality at the expense of many other important issues. And finally, they have uncritically supported Democratic Party centrists and their corporate backers, who do nothing to advance the interests of most LGBT people.



## The Capitalist Roots of Homophobia

Liberal common sense identifies homophobia and transphobia simply as attitudes that ought to be changed through exposure and sensitivity training. Socialists believe that this approach will only go so far as long as we live in a capitalist society riven by economic competition. We understand “family-values” religious traditionalism as a misguided response to the destabilizing effects of capitalism, and in particular, to the neoliberal policies of the last forty years, which have devastated working class communities and families. A socialist reorganization of economic life would provide all people with a greater degree of control over the conditions of their lives, and would be the essential precondition for eliminating the rage that is mistakenly directed at the homosexual or gender-non-conforming person.



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## The Other Path: LGBTQ Militants in History

We recognize and honor the role that LGBTQ individuals have historically played in the fight for socialism, peace, and liberation both in the United States and abroad. Our tradition is the tradition of those gay men, lesbians, and trans people who devoted themselves to the struggle for social justice—individuals like Rose Schneiderman, Bayard Rustin, David McReynolds, and so many others. LGBTQ people were, and continue to be, at the forefront of the most important American social movements: the women’s liberation movement; the antiwar, anti-imperialist, and anti-nuclear movements; the labor movement; and the movement for black freedom. We also recognize that healthcare has historically been one of the central rallying points for LGBTQ individuals, who face unique health challenges and, during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s, were among the loudest voices pushing for a universal, guaranteed right to free healthcare. In summary, the movement for LGBTQ liberation emerged from the socialist Left, and this movement cannot be carried forward without continuing and strengthening that vital and historic relationship.



## LGBTQ Liberation and Socialism: A Convergence of Values

LGBTQ liberationists uphold the values of love, affection, and solidarity beyond stigma or exclusion. Our utopian demand for “liberation” implies that individuals ought to be free to express themselves and to come together to realize their collective aspirations and desires without unnecessary limitations being imposed by economic competition or by the coercive state. These are values that point the way beyond the affective and libidinal economy of scarcity that exists under capitalism, but which depend on socialist economic reorganization to become more widely realized in our society. At the same time, these values complement and deepen the socialist vision of cooperation, mutuality, and respect for the autonomy and potential of every individual. In short, socialism is the precondition of LGBTQ liberation, and LGBTQ liberation is the precondition of socialism.



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## Suggested Reading

Oscar Wilde,  
“The Soul of Man Under Socialism”

John Lauritsen and David Thorstad,  
The Early Homosexual Rights  
Movement: (1864-1935)

John D’Emilio,  
“Capitalism and Gay Identity”

Sherry Wolfe,  
Sexuality and Socialism

Dennis Altman,  
Homosexual: Oppression  
and Liberation

Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds.,  
Out of the Closets:  
Voices of Gay Liberation

New American Movement,  
Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian  
Liberation and Socialism

Emily K. Hobson,  
Lavender and Red: Liberation and  
Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left

Amber Hollibaugh and Nikhil Pal Singh,  
“Sexuality, Labor, and the  
New Trade Unionism”

Against Equality:  
<http://www.againstequality.org/>

Leslie Feinberg,  
Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue