

# New offensive in Trump's war on transgender people

## ***FIGHTING WORDS***

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By Cassandra Devereaux

In the latest assault by the Trump administration on transgender rights and the dignity of transgender persons, it has been revealed via a leaked memo that the Department of Health and Human Services is planning to enact a guideline that will restrict the definition of a person's sex to that recorded on the original copy of their birth certificate. The effect of this will strip away the civil rights afforded to transgender people under Title IX as well as adversely impact the rights of intersex persons.

Protests against the bigoted HHS guideline have taken place across the country, from New York City and Washington, D.C., to Oakland, California, and Los Angeles, and a growing list of places in between. "We won't be erased!" is the main battle cry as trans people (and their supporters) fight for their very lives in the face of Trump's new plan.

The hostility toward transgender people by this craven administration is nothing new. Indeed, rescinding civil rights protections for the trans community has been a priority from the beginning. A month after the 2017 inauguration, it turned back protections that allowed students to use bathroom facilities according to their self-identified gender. This has been a vital protection for a community that regularly suffers violence in public restrooms.

Then, Trump attempted to ban transgender people from military service. While U.S. military might serves to impose imperialist rule over the global south, the "poverty draft" has been a means of survival and subsistence for oppressed peoples. Transgender people, especially those of color, suffer profound economic disenfranchisement and this path out of poverty must be acknowledged.

The cruelty of this act was appreciated by those enacting it. The Washington Post quoted an unnamed senior official who spoke of their political opponents by saying, "It will be fun to watch some of them have to defend [transgender service members]." Ultimately, the courts overturned this ban. The proximity of this latest assault on trans rights to the swearing in of far-right Supreme Court justice and sexual offender Brett Kavanaugh, after nearly two years of stacking the courts with reactionary judges, is noteworthy.

This proposed HHS guideline says that the legal category of sex (and therefore gender as well) is to be based on science, but it lacks scientific insight. There's still much to understand on the matter, but neurological studies indicate that there are near-identical activation patterns and structures in the brains of both trans and cisgender women, as distinct from those of cisgender and trans men. The same patterns hold true for transgender and cisgender men. This points to the fact that transgender identity has a biological basis, meaning this policy will be in defiance of science. But, of course, this has never been about science.

## **Fight back against bigotry and violence**

Trans lives are too often brief ones. Half of transgender people suffer from depression and/or anxiety. Forty-one percent report having attempted suicide, nine times the rate of their cisgender peers. The number of completed suicides among the trans population is unknown.

The murder rate, too, is unknown, largely due to misgendering in police reports and in the media. At the time of this writing on October 24, there have been 22 known trans murder victims in 2018, most of whom were trans women of color. Hate, and the social and material disenfranchisement that flows from it, costs lives.

The rights to be suppressed by this HHS action are, by and large, those that were won by applying pressure to the previous presidential administration. This illustrates the unavoidable truth that rights won through bourgeois electoral politics are fickle. What is given one day may be easily taken away the next.

The very real possibility of the repeal of Roe v. Wade and the loss of abortion rights and bodily autonomy for half the population is another chilling example. This is because we are at the mercy of the mercurial whims of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, of which any President is only the head.

When explaining this action, Trump, a self-described nationalist, said the HHS proposal is to “protect all Americans.” In saying this, he reveals what he hopes to uphold, and who is a threat. More to the point, it’s a statement of who he intends to live in the country he claims to be making great, and who he wants to stop existing.

Real liberation cannot be won in our ballot boxes today; only a temporary respite of certain oppressions can be achieved. Division and oppression are the nature of the capitalist imperialist system. They have kept us at each other's throats in order to keep us from turning against them, our true oppressors. This awful system can be dismantled only with solidarity across lines of oppressions and of those who stand with us.

In order to defend ourselves and those we hold closest to our hearts, we must come together as a class and as oppressed peoples in solidary and self-defense. We must protect each other, love each other, and fight together shoulder to shoulder. We must be a united fist thrust forth in defiance of the rich and powerful.

It's time we come together and get to work.

*Cassandra Devereaux is a Bay Area (California) transgender activist and Communist Workers League organizer.*

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