

Where's Rosie? – by Ana Davies. Visitor's report Conference 2021

The latest issue to embroil the party is the issue of Trans Rights and Women's Rights, Angela Rayner has stated that they are mutually exclusive. Politicians are being asked about female anatomy and are being caught in the headlights, blurting out vagaries that normal electors would find confusing. Rosie Duffield MP has been singular in her conviction that your birth sex matters and simply self identifying presents problems for authorities and women groups who have fought hard for women's rights. Like all contentious issues the debate has become toxic, the Labour Party so love their binary stand on issues. I decided therefore to find out more. Let me declare my stance is from a 50ish year old woman, a little older than Rosie, I attended the fringe meeting where Rosie Duffield joined as a last minute surprise guest. The event was publicised by word of mouth with the venue location shared in the last minute. Labour friends advised, don't go alone, don't get photographed, be careful. As it happened there was a small group outside, it was raining so hard I had my jacket over my head anyway and there was some chanting, nothing harassing but just making it clear that Trans men were men and Trans women were women and Brighton was an LGBTQ+ town.

This meeting held in the backdrop of Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves being asked questions about whether only women have a cervix. I personally would have preferred they were clearer about this, the Tories of course building political divisive capital on this. Our politicians need to be clear. Women and Transgender men (unless they have a hysterectomy) have a Cervix and need access to services that prevent cervical cancer. Trans women do not, but if they have oestrogen therapy they may be at risk of breast cancer. I think not skirting around the issue, informing the electorate that we are looking out for everyone's interests including minority rights is what the public expect and will accept as normal mainstream politics. Blunt or evasive answers with no context is unhelpful for all.

Angela Rayner spoke at a fringe meeting on Labour's commitment to update the Gender recognition Act, to create a process of Self ID. This is great news for the Trans community who are disproportionately targeted and need the same protection as other minority groups. Is it true though to say that there are no conflicts between Womens rights and Trans rights? This is where things get murky and I attended the meeting hoping that I'd come out more informed.

We started with a physiology lesson. This was uncontentious stuff. Trans Women benefit from early years and puberty development and would be considerably stronger and faster than those born as a biological woman, testosterone suppressants have little impact on physical stamina because of those early years' advantages. It's what's kept sports council committees up worrying about fairness over inclusion. Yesterday 30th Sept UK sports bodies [concluded that fairness vs safety and inclusion are hard to reconcile](#) and that sports bodies will have to decide one or the other or perhaps create extra categories. We'll have to wait and see but it is important to still find a way to be inclusive.

David Lammy's conference speech came up quite a bit, are women dinosaurs for defending their rights?

This didn't go down well at all. Whilst an analogy between same sex marriages vs those who deny these hard won rights is clearly in dinosaur territory, the argument we were presented was as follows. Women have fought hard for their spaces and the Labour party are committed to protecting women against violence. Trans gender men and women are similarly subject to abuse and violence and also need safe spaces. As most violence against women (including Trans Gender women) is perpetrated by men, asking women to make space for Trans Women, seems to be putting the responsibility on women to address the issue, giving up the right to being treated in sport fairly, having their own spaces in refuges, changing rooms and toilets.

Before writing this I did catch up with a young Labour activist who is of a mind that Rosie Duffield MP should be expelled from the party. I was shown some of the tweets that were liked and messaging, and whilst I can see that liking the cosplaying tweet (a term I had never heard of before) was ill advised, I do think if this debate is to result in good outcomes for women and the trans community, everyone needs to listen to each other and respect everyone's viewpoint. Making Rosie the poster girl for Transphobia is not fair.

At the meeting, I was speaking to a couple of women, I told them I didn't have an issue with sharing a toilet with a Trans woman, but they were adamant that a mother with young girls might not quite see it that way. It's possible that bad faith self-identified women may take advantage but am persuaded that anyone including girls can inflict violence in these spaces and to exclude Trans women from these spaces given the percentage of incidents, would only serve to marginalise this community more.

On prisons, these are tough places, trans women in prison sharing spaces with often young vulnerable incarcerated women. In prisons physiology matters, women and Trans men whilst incidents are low, are at risk. Our Shadow Justice Secretary needs to come up with an innovative way of dealing with this.

Incidentally, I wasn't impressed with the flyer that referred to Trans women as men, they were quotes from women prisoners, but both sides need to be respectful, equally slurs like TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) need to be dropped, it shuts down debate.

Rosie joined the meeting at the end and spoke about her isolation on the subject, fellow MPs whilst privately backing her, are themselves confused and worried about upsetting the LGBTQ+ community.

Finally, in the same way I really don't like being tagged as BAME, we have so many different communities. The LGBTQ+ umbrella in the same way is too broad, those whose interests are around same sex attraction have very different issues to those with gender based issues. There was an appeal to listen to the lesbian and gay community too, in the same way we have our wonderful Labour Women's Network.