

INTERVIEW: Francine Thompson

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We just celebrated the 40th anniversary of Roe v Wade, and yet more states have imposed restrictions on reproductive rights (43 state laws were passed in 2012 and 92 in 2011, according to the Guttmacher Institute). What is the cause of these increasing restrictions?

I don't think there is a single or simple answer to that question. Within hours of Roe becoming law, the anti-choice movement was preparing opposition. And for 40 years, they have chipped away at the structure of Roe v Wade. Some political success has emboldened them. Unfortunately, in the chaos of today's world, many people are motivated by "the fear of." Fear-based messages regarding health, morality and finances impact political decision making. The anti-choice faction has done well with single-issue organizing. The pro-choice faction includes a spectrum of issues along a choice continuum. We recognize the many intersections and complexities of women's health.

What do these restrictions say about the feminist movement today?

I am not sure that I think it sends a message about feminists per se. In a recent poll, 70% of Americans did not want Roe to be overturned. That feels much different than the rhetoric that was associated with the presidential election where women's issues were used as currency for political gain (or losses in some cases).

1 in 3 women will have an abortion in their lifetime, yet abortion is the most politically divisive social issue in America today. I think that we need to find ways to engage more fully (and without stigma) the 1 in 3 women who have had an abortion.

Can you explain in more depth the "feminist approach" to healthcare at EGC and how it differs from other clinics?

Many of the feminist health care approaches that are embedded in EGC's delivery of services have now become a part of mainstream medicine. Informed consent, participatory health care and client-centered care were all approaches introduced by the women's movement and the feminist health care centers of the 1970s.

One thing that continues to differentiate EGC from other providers is that who we provide health care

to is as important as how we provide health care. We continue to attempt to increase access for marginalized populations: LGBT, people of color, people living in poverty and those that are traditionally underserved. Our feminist philosophy is also institutionalized, in that with our employment policies, we strive to be women and family friendly.

Please describe the significance of Emma Goldman to the feminist movement in general and reproductive freedom in particular.

Emma is significant and an asset because it is a locally-based, locally-responsive clinic, and Emma's presence in the community increases the strength of diversity in the health care ecosystem.

There are currently only 13 remaining Feminist Health Care Clinics in the US, that are not for profit and provide abortion care.

I think that these statements, taken from the Feminist Abortion Network's page (FAN) of which we are a member, sums it up:

We are feminist. We believe that individuals are capable of making informed decisions about their health care, and they deserve to do so in an atmosphere of dignity and respect and as active participants in their care.

We are independent. Our health care practices are not directed by corporate mandates, but by the needs of our communities. Our independence allows us to be accessible and responsive to our communities and enables us to take action on emerging and immediate community needs.

We are nonprofit. We provide support and services to vulnerable and historically marginalized communities. We are not responsible to stock holders, but to our community, our Board of Directors, and our stakeholders.

We are abortion providers. We are proud partners of the broader reproductive justice movement that advocates for a woman's right to determine whether and when to have children, to become a parent, to parent with dignity, to have a healthy safe pregnancy, and to have healthy safe families and relationships.

Are the communities in Iowa City supportive of EGC? Please describe any opposition it encounters.

Iowa City is generally a very supportive community. We do experience regular protests -- at least 1 day per week. There is also an undercurrent of indirect but significant opposition from anti-choice organizations and crisis pregnancy centers, through misleading information and fear based advertising of their services. A more current tactic of the opposition is the use of nuisance complaints and reports to administrative organizations.

What are some of the greatest challenges the EGC faces today?

The greatest threats and challenges for the clinic and for reproductive health care come in the form of legislative threats. Increasing restrictions for the women seeking services impact access tremendously.

Many of the increasing regulations for clinics are cumbersome and nearly impossible to comply with. They put an increased stress on small non-profit finances and staff resources.

What message would you like to send to socialist feminists in celebration of International Women's Day?

I would like us to remember that integrative -- multiple oppressions exist at the same time. In order to influence policy and affect change it will require working across social justice issues, bringing diverse issues and people together to obtain the necessary social supports to live healthy lives in healthy families, and in safe and sustainable communities.

In celebration of International Women's Day, it is good to be reminded that our individual grassroots efforts can be replicated globally.

As Audre Lord wrote, "there can be no hierarchies of oppression".

We are all in this together.

What's Your Favorite Book on Socialist Feminism?

Feminism and Class Power
by bell hooks

"Her language and approach make me feel like she's speaking to me as opposed to at me. I actually feel engaged with the words, with the simplicity of the message. When I read, I sincerely felt like I could take that chapter, walk around the block, and hand it to anyone I saw, and they would enjoy the words, and possibly take the message home with them to tell others."
-- Mimi Soltysik, Chair, Socialist Party of California

The Woman Question

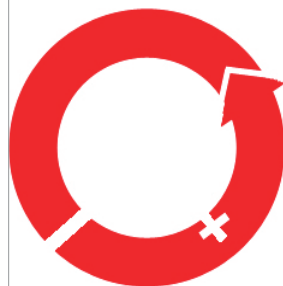
"Required reading for historical context."
-- Michelle Borok, Los Angeles Local (via Mongolia)

Patriarchy and Accumulation On A World Scale
by Maria Mies

"This book helped me through Marxist contradictions that the division of labor along gender lines would be solved with modern capitalism. Mies shows the role that first and third world women play under a global capitalist patriarchy; that socialism will not end patriarchy by engaging women in the modern workplace ... in the endless destruction of the ecosystem with their brothers; that the true labor of women is still largely unpaid, invisible and considered a natural part of her existence, yet, it is this exploitation that subsidizes all other work."
-- Bennett Foster, Chair, Memphis Local

Women And American Socialism 1870-1920
by Mari Jo Buhle

-- Art Kazar, Chicago Local



**International
Women's Day
March 8th**