

Introduction to the 2018 IIRE LGBTIQ seminar
(on the first six seminars and the 2003 World Congress resolution)
Peter Drucker
14 July 2018

Thanks to the team for asking me to do this introduction. I'm very aware of my limitations: I'm not much of an LGBTIQ activist in the Netherlands, and because I haven't been part of the seminar organizing team since 2016, I'm not well informed about what's happened in the past two years. So I'll just focus on the past, up to 2016. This introduction has two parts: the first part on the first three IIRE seminars (in 1998, 2000 and 2002) and the 2003 World Congress resolution; the second part on the next three seminars (in 2009, 2014 and 2016).

Attempts were made to coordinate lesbian/gay/bi work internationally in the FI starting in the 1970s. But the first three IIRE seminars were the first systematic, continuous effort to coordinate our work and arrive at a common understanding. The 2003 World Congress resolution reflected the discussions of those first three seminars, although it was important that there was a commission of the FI leadership that did the actual drafting. The resolution's aim was to consolidate a minimum consensus, essentially around work that had been done and theoretical and programmatic gains that had been made in the 1970s and 1980s. In that sense the resolution was a success: it was adopted by an overwhelming vote at the World Congress, and hasn't been fundamentally challenged since then.

Looking back, though, the resolution had some obvious limitations. The title – 'On Lesbian/Gay Liberation' – clearly indicates one limitation. That title more or less reflected the composition of the first three seminars, which were lesbian/gay/bisexual seminars. There were no self-identified trans or intersex participants. There were participants who identified as queer, but the resolution did not include a full consensus on what queer politics meant to us. I think that the resolution's one point on trans oppression and struggles was decent; but trans and intersex identities – which are in fact far older and more widespread in human history than gay identities – were not part of the resolution's basic historical and theoretical framework. The resolution also reflected our geographical limitations. Internationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism were part of its core analysis; it reflected some strong experience by FI organizations in Latin American movements going back to the 1970s; and it included a strong awareness of South African and European and North American black struggles. But we were and still are weak in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. The resolution was also weak on the Arab region and Asia generally, though we have made some headway since then.

Still, there were some major positive features of the 2003 resolution. It drew on the 1979 and later FI resolutions on women's liberation to make an intimate connection with feminism, particularly underlining the importance of lesbian feminist struggles. The gains we have made since 2003 on understanding trans and intersex oppression and struggles have only confirmed this key link to feminism, both through a connection to women's liberation generally and through an understanding that gender as an issue goes beyond cis women's struggles. [An additional, key point that Terry made in the discussion: the 2003 resolution paralleled the FI women's liberation resolutions in stressing the importance of LGBTIQ self-organization, of autonomous LGBTIQ movements, and of autonomous LGBTIQ organization in other movements and in the radical and revolutionary left.] The 2003 resolution showed a clear understanding of the limits of the gains that we can make under capitalism, of how neoliberal austerity hurts LGBTIQ people specifically, and of the need for a working-class perspective in our struggles. It was also clear on the terrible impact of Stalinism on our struggles, a legacy perpetuated by Maoism and in the first decades of the Cuban revolution, and even beyond those explicitly heterosexist currents, by heterosexism on the left more generally. This is still a problem today, even if the forms heterosexism takes are often more subtle now, and part 3 of the resolution is still a valuable guide to how to fight heterosexism in our own organizations.

The 2003 resolution also reflected an accumulation of experience in several key areas of work: particularly youth work, trade union work and the fight against AIDS. We've sustained that experience in the youth work; we haven't in trade union and AIDS work, but I think the lessons the resolution drew are still useful. And I think point 17 of the resolution, on same-sex marriage, was a truly original contribution, using an exemplary transitional approach, and (unlike most of the resolution) taking a cutting-edge position at the time. Remember, at the time only one country in the world (the Netherlands) had actually introduced same-sex marriage, so most of the big battles on the issue were still ahead. It would have been great if we had managed to put our perspective – fighting for marriage equality in a way that also challenged marriage as an institution – into practice after 2003. Unfortunately, we haven't. Part of the problem has been that our own national leaderships haven't taken enough account of the 2003 resolution in formulating their positions. Another problem, though, was highlighted by the French comrades in our discussion of marriage at the 2014 seminar: in the heat of the struggle, facing sometimes overwhelming homophobia from right-wing opponents of marriage equality, we've never had the relationship of forces we needed to make a nuanced, transitional position a significant part of the debate.

Now I'd like to talk about some ways in which we've managed since 2003 – at the 2009, 2014 and 2016 seminars – to move beyond the 2003 resolution. We've gone back to some issues, benefiting from more experience and dealing with new challenges: marriage (as I just mentioned), lesbian struggles, and the challenges we face inside broad anti-capitalist parties with strong institutional presences (we've had *much* more experience with this since 2003). We've also had some very useful discussions of the LGBTIQ dimensions of the Arab and other uprisings since the outbreak of the crisis in 2008 – though it's been difficult to get too far in these discussions, given the huge obstacles for LGBTIQ struggles particularly in the Arab region.

I would say that the two areas where we've made the most progress since 2003 have been trans/intersex issues and issues of imperialism, homonationalism and heteronationalism. The 2016 seminar had our best discussions so far on trans and intersex struggles, with a concrete focus on trans struggles in Portugal, the Netherlands and Europe more broadly and on intersex organizing on an international scale. Potentially, that discussion could be the beginning of some major theoretical and programmatic advances for us. But we face a big problem in rooting this discussion in FI organizations. The problem is symbolized by the fact that of the three reporters in the 2016 trans/intersex discussion, not one of them is active today in a political organization that the FI is engaged in. This is mainly a problem of the FI, in failing to sufficiently value this work and integrate it into our politics more broadly. I hope and trust that there are some FI organizations that are doing better in this area of activism. Because we can hardly say to the trans/intersex activists from outside our ranks who have joined in our discussions: could you please join the FI and organize our trans and intersex work for us? But until we manage to tackle this problem collectively, we're going to have a hard time moving beyond the basic educational discussions we've had so far, and fully integrate trans and intersex issues into our Marxist feminist theory and programme.

Imperialism, homonationalism (imperialist instrumentalization of LGBTI rights) and heteronationalism (reactionary instrumentalization of anti-LGBTIQ prejudice) have I think been somewhat more broadly discussed and understood in the FI. These issues are after all closely connected to broader problems related to the challenges facing US and European imperialism in the current geopolitical chaos, which was a main focus of the recent FI World Congress. But still, more discussions in the FI are needed on the specific sexual and gender dimensions, and the discussions should lead to drawing common conclusions. We face particularly difficult challenges around these issues for example in Latin America (like Brazil and Mexico, where we face both official state homonationalism and fierce heteronationalist offensives) and the Arab region (where we need to fight a huge heteronationalist tide without succumbing to LGBTI complicity with imperialism).

The bulk of the work on addressing these theoretical and programmatic issues still remains to be done. In the run-up to 2003, as I mentioned at the beginning, the FI leadership set up a commission that made it possible to translate our discussions at the first three seminars into a World Congress document. We didn't have anything comparable going into the 2010 or 2018 World Congresses. In the run-up to 2010, our 2009 seminar launched the process of drafting a few amendments that were integrated into the World Congress texts. In the run-up to both 2010 and 2018, the Women's Commission really did a lot of our work for us, and as a result the 2018 resolutions include a lot of good points that indirectly reflect our seminar discussions (as well of course as the women's seminar discussions). But we need to give some thought into how we can have input into the next World Congress. This is one of the tasks of the LGBTIQ Commission that we're now setting up.

[PS At the meeting of the LGBTIQ Commission that took place after the seminar, I summarized a few additional points where I thought we had made particular progress at this 2018 seminar, and which we need to focus on in the coming months and years. (1) We began to deepen our understanding of how the rise of the right is connected to generalized violence in e.g. Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines, and to more selective, usually racist violence in the imperialist countries, with LGBTIQ people sometimes being targets of this violence in general and in other cases the violence being focused largely on racialized and trans people. (2) We began to clarify our way of doing solidarity, which is rooted in common participation in transformational struggle, as opposed to a hierarchy of identities, victimhood and 'allyship'. (3) We continued to deepen our understanding of lesbian oppression and struggles, rejecting a perspective in which lesbian identity is seen as inherently essentialist, suspect and/or anti-trans.]