

Melbourne Radical Women Statement

End the violence:
Turn rage into a feminist fightback!



June 18, on this winter Melbourne evening, a vigil of countless thousands in Princes Park mourned the killing of Eurydice Dixon. Eurydice was raped and murdered while walking home through the park late at night after a comedy gig. She was 22 years old.

Nearly six years earlier, many thousands marched down Brunswick's Sydney Road, past the spot where Jill Meagher had been kidnapped, then raped and killed. She was on her way home from a night out with friends. Jill was 29.

In both tragedies, police issued advice to women: think about your safety. And both times, the media harvested quotes to show women's fear. The public message from the powers-that-be was clear: when women go out alone, there could be consequences.

Both times, women's response was immediate and unambiguous: We're not scared, we're angry! The Princes Park vigil facebook callout, titled "Reclaim Princes Park," said this: "We all should be able to walk home, whenever we want, wherever we want, and assume we will make it home safe. Our bodies are not there for taking. It is not up to us to keep ourselves safe when we know it's up to men to choose not to inflict violence upon us."

Jill Meagher's murder spurred the largest Reclaim the Night in memory. Up to 8,000 women, joined by men, marched down Sydney Road with an unequivocal message: A woman's place is **everywhere**, however we dress and whatever the hour!

This also goes for whatever our colour, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, occupation or circumstances. We remember Tracy Connelly, a sex worker murdered in St Kilda; Aboriginal women Lynette Daley, raped to death by two white men, Rebecca Maher, picked up by police while walking home, Ms Dhu, locked up for poverty, and both killed in custody; Mayang Prasetyo, a trans woman killed by her husband; Qi Yu, murdered last week.

Every year in Australia, over 300,000 women experience violence – often sexual violence – from someone other than a partner. Add Aboriginality, colour, same-sex attraction, transgender identity, sex as a job, or disability to being a woman, and the statistics rise dramatically. Staying home, as police and media warn us, or taking precautions, as Eurydice did, do not safeguard women from harm.

Sexism is a social disease. Misogyny stalks everywhere — in the home and workplace, on the campus, in the streets, parks and even cyberspace. Online harassment is rife, where women, LGBTIQ people and people of colour are special targets.

The source of this disease is property. In a society where everything is a commodity, valued only for the profit it creates, women have a special place — in the home, under a man's authority. Women are vital upkeepers of the economy. We breed the workers and keep them clothed, fed and healthy. We take them to school, send them off to work and give them stability. The home is the engine room of the economy, and women run it for free. We're supposed to be examples to children who learn to respect authority by respecting it ourselves. Laws, custom and economic measures shoehorn us into dependency on men; we're their property. Women behaving independently, homosexuality and transgenderism upset this capitalist arrangement, and there are penalties.

The women's liberation movement of the 1960s rocked the system at its foundations. Rights to abortion and contraception, no-fault divorce, child custody and division of property, women's studies, the demand for equal pay shook the status quo. Alongside this were the mighty movements for Aboriginal sovereignty and LGBTIQ equality. Historic concessions were won on all fronts.

But the economy is unraveling. The controllers in power, "the 1%," are trying desperately to claw everything back. Capitalism needs women back in the home, and queers and trans people back in the closet. A far-right backlash is building, joined by neo-Nazis and their kinder, küche, kirche (children, kitchen, church) ideology. "Traditional values" — violently sexist, racist, transphobic, homophobic and xenophobic — are having a comeback. Misogyny is off its leash. According to Destroy the Joint, Eurydice is the 30th woman murdered in Australia this year. The violence will escalate, if we don't do something.

We can stop the violence! Jill Meagher's murder gave the state government a perfect law-and-order opportunity. Police and Moreland Council teamed up to push for CCTV cameras. The idea of more surveillance brought strong opposition from the community, who called instead for a swathe of **preventative** measures — from more street lighting and all-night public transport to an education campaign to combat sexist and racist stereotypes and culture. Radical Women also suggested practical Council support for grassroots organising, of which women are the backbone, by providing free venues and printing and actively promoting community-based initiatives. RW argued that profit-serving governments — by decimating public housing, education, childcare, healthcare and supports for victims of family violence

— are **fuelling** the violence. But Moreland Council ignored these voices and took a quarter-of-a-million dollars from the state government to install the cameras. Other local governments, including Melbourne City Council, followed suit. CCTV cameras can't prevent an act of violence — as tragically demonstrated in Princes Park. Tougher bail conditions and sentencing laws aren't deterrents, either, as legal rights advocates have said all along.

We should look to the militant women's movement of the 1960s and the feminist uprising in Chile right now — where massive marches demanding the end to sexual violence have spread across the country — and build one here. A fierce, feminist fightback — coalescing all women and solidarising with sisters everywhere — would strike fear in the misogynists and the system that produces them. The spontaneous and powerful message from Eurydice's and Jill's murders that we won't take this anymore can be the spark that transforms righteous rage into a fiery, game-changing movement.

In memory of Eurydice and all our sisters, let's do it.

If you agree, get in touch with Radical Women. We'd love to hear from you!
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