

# United States: Resistance Is on the Agenda - Three socialist feminists reflect on the Women's March

Monday 13 February 2017, by [ARRUZZA Cinzia](#), [BRENNER Johanna](#), [HOLMSTROM Nancy](#) (Date first published: 1 February 2017).

**Three socialist feminists reflect on the Women's March and what comes next in the movement to resist Trump.**

## Contents

- [Cinzia Arruzza](#)
- [Johanna Brenner](#)
- [Nancy Holmstrom](#)

The Women's March earlier this month may be viewed by future historians as the inauguration of the popular resistance to Trump as well as the resurrection of feminism as a collective political project. The character of that resistance, and of this renewed feminist energy, will still have to be shaped in the months and years ahead. Will the broad forces who participated continue to espouse a liberal perspective, or will they adopt a sharper left-wing outlook and strategy? Will there be splits in the movement, or will the Left be able to shift the popular anti-Trump base away from the consensus of the neoliberal center?

It's difficult to answer these questions now, but it is urgent that the Left continue to reflect on the women's march in order to build a roadmap of what comes next, both for resisting Trump and reviving the socialist-feminist project. Here, three *Jacobin* contributors offer analysis of the march and what left activists can do next.

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## Cinzia Arruzza

Every single analysis of what happened on January 21 and of what will come next should start with the insight that hundreds of thousands of people with no previous political experience and even with no previous participation in any demonstration whatsoever decided to take to the streets against the Trump administration. January 21 has created the potential for a new mass movement.

Granted, it is a very fragile possibility, and the way we handle it will be crucial for its actualization or its irremediable loss. Whatever criticisms we may have of the limitations of this event should be articulated with a sense of political responsibility because the stakes are high.

The main criticisms of the women's march have emphasized that the march was too white, that it was hegemonized by liberals, and that it was an "interest group" or an "identity based" march, when what we really need is a universalistic mobilization involving everybody.

The first two criticisms have a point: the march was indeed too white and it was hegemonized by liberals in mainstream media (although this liberal self-representation in the media did not exactly reflect the much more articulated composition of the marches). But the relevant question, here, is the one asked by Alicia Garza:

*"More than a moral question, it is a practical one. Can we build a movement of millions with the people who may not grasp our black, queer, feminist, intersectional, anticapitalist, anti-imperialist ideology but know that we deserve a better life and who are willing to fight for it and win? . . . Hundreds of thousands of people are trying to figure out what it means to join a movement. If we demonstrate that to be a part of a movement, you must believe that people cannot change, that transformation is not possible, that it's more important to be right than to be connected and interdependent, we will not win."*

The third criticism, on the contrary, entirely misses the point. It's useful to recall that women's marches have started a number of rather important revolutions like the French Revolution and the February revolution in Russia. In Western Europe students and the radicalized youth started the '68 movement. In the United States the Civil Rights Movement began a wave of struggles that then expanded to campuses and to the 1960s antiwar movement.

The connection between the events that triggered or prepared the grounds for subsequent struggles and the struggles themselves is not necessarily a politically coherent one; contingent — and often unpredictable facts — coalesced to determine the specific dynamic of each wave of movements over the course of many years. The relevant question, then, is not "when will we stop mobilizing on the basis of identity or interest groups and start the serious revolutionary mobilization?" It is rather: "Can this mobilization function as a catalyst for a larger struggle and open a new political space that can be inhabited by a number of different political and social subjectivities in solidarity with each other?"

We have good reason to believe that this may be the case in the United States today. Indeed, women's marches around the country have already worked as a catalyst for the convergence of other struggles. For example, Fight for \$15 took part in women's rallies in a number of cities on January 21.

Moreover, the women's march in the United States is part of a global process that has seen women mobilizing in a number of countries — from the women's strikes in Argentina, Poland, and Ireland to the massive women's demonstration in Italy last November.

What next, then? An international coalition regrouping feminist and women's groups from around thirty countries has called for an international women's strike on March 8 against heterosexist violence. Women, trans women, and all the people who support their struggle will strike, march, and protest in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Turkey, South Korea, and other countries.

In this vein, it wouldn't be absurd to suggest that the first step for women and LGBTQ people after January 21, in the United States, could be the creation of grassroots coalitions and possibly a national coalition to join the international women's strike on March 8. This would expand the scope of the mobilization beyond opposition to Trump's administration and would contribute to making the movement less white. It would also help us rethink what a strike means, and how we can include

diverse populations, including those outside the formal labor market, in our struggles.

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## **Johanna Brenner**

How can the Left build on the excitement, creativity, and political energy that this astonishing mobilization called forth? First, let us immediately agree not to spend another minute criticizing the marchers' liberal politics or their pink hats or their "peacefulness." Let's also acknowledge that the demand for bodily self-determination and respect — whether around sexual harassment, rape culture, or access to abortion — are fundamental demands that the Left must support. Then we can begin to think through how to connect women's legitimate outrage to all the other struggles that will be part of an ongoing resistance to Trumpism and the right-wing agenda.

Our politics will have to go beyond defensive postures like "love trumps hate" or "an injury to one is an injury to all." There's nothing wrong with these sentiments, but we have to articulate what we have in common other than a common enemy. What are we for that unites us?

The best place to start is local. Liberal organizations are going to more or less control the click-activism and "call Congress" responses to the many provocations issuing from Trump and the Republicans. But at the local level we have the possibility to organize coalitions around a feminist, anticapitalist, antiracist politics. Here are a few ideas about how we might do this.

The politics of reproductive justice, developed over the past twenty years by women of color activists and organizations like Sister Song, offers a way to connect what are often seen as separate, single issues. Reproductive justice argues that it is every person's right, regardless of their gender identity or expression, to end a pregnancy, continue a pregnancy, to never have children, to build a family, and raise children with health, dignity, and freedom from violence. Here's an example of a reproductive justice "speakout": women telling abortion stories paired with environmental justice activists telling stories of their children's asthma; immigrant women telling stories about sexual harassment at work paired with fast-food workers describing how their crazy schedules harm their kids.

We also need to think through how to square the analysis of the police as a tool of white supremacy and capitalist power with the "law and order" feminism that demands more policing of sexual assault. Here again we should appreciate the work that Native American and black feminists (such as Incite!) have done in creating alternatives to relying upon the carceral state. This model shows how it is possible to, for example, mobilize to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline, while also linking this violation of indigenous sovereignty to the history of state violence against native communities that has led to sexual violence within native communities.

In these ways we can work towards developing a politics of care that centers on the "right to give care" as well as the "right to be cared for." In doing so, we foster opportunities to challenge the everyday denial of these rights by corporate capital and the neoliberal austerity state, and to move beyond sentimental invocations of the family toward a broader vision of caring as social solidarity.

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## **Nancy Holmstrom**

I came back from the Women's March in Washington, DC exhausted but thrilled, convinced that we are seeing the birth of a new women's movement. The size, the inclusiveness, the defiant but good-humored spirit, and the progressive politics of the march make me very optimistic.

My optimism came after an initial wariness about having the only big march planned around Trump's inauguration being a specifically women's march. There are so many issues to protest, and from a glance it looked like the gathering would be just a liberal Hillary event. But the actual demonstration proved otherwise. Key issues were connected to women's issues: there was a Women for Climate Justice contingent, antiwar marchers, and a lot of participants raised race and criminal justice issues.

Certainly many marchers and speakers were liberal, not left. But the political reality today is that many basic liberal gains are threatened by the rise of the Right. Socialists need to be present in these struggles, pushing people to go beyond relying on the Democratic Party.

As Tamika Mallory, a young black woman who was one of the national co-chairs of the event said: "You're scared now; well this has always been our reality," under Clinton and even Obama. Many of the speakers were very radical and militant, particularly around race and gender issues. They included rape survivors, gay and trans women, a formerly incarcerated woman, black women elected officials, and others, including six-year-old Sophie Cruz who said we were "building a chain of love to protect our families" from deportation. Many (including Madonna) invoked the word "revolution," though it was mostly used to call for a "revolution of love." Angela Davis, unsurprisingly, was the most radical.

This new women's movement that seems to be emerging will be mixed ideologically, just like the march itself. The "Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles" on the march's website reflects this fact. It starts with consensus ideals about human rights and women's rights, before broadening the call to include gender justice, racial justice, and economic justice.

The coalition's call for economic justice is the weakest. It calls for an "economy powered by transparency, accountability, security and equity . . . workforce opportunities that reduce discrimination . . . and the right to "organize for a living wage." It makes no mention, however, of the \$15 an hour demand and while it recognizes the need for "equal pay for equal work" it makes no mention of "equal work."

But how could we expect otherwise? We are far from a mass socialist movement.

Yet, today, thanks to Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and the Sanders campaign, these issues are at least on the agenda. When the Republicans repeal the Affordable Care Act, and have nothing better to replace it, many of Trump's followers will be surprised and disappointed. This will give us an opening to raise the demand for single payer, stressing how it is a women's issue and a race issue, pushing the liberals in the new women's movement to extend their call for "reproductive health care for all" to simply "health care for all."

Mainstream feminists today, like Hillary Clinton, have moved far to the right of the women's

liberation movement of the 1970s where social welfare feminists like Gloria Steinem represented the mainstream. But implicit in a lot of the Women's March principles is a more radical politics. Socialists should be prepared to draw out these more radical alternatives. As speaker after speaker said, this is only the beginning. Resistance is on the agenda.

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**P.S.**

\* Jacobin. 2.1.17:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/womens-march-washington-trump-inauguration-protest/>