

United States : Alone in a crowd Socialist feminists should endorse the Women's March

dimanche 10 octobre 2021, par [BOTTA Emma Wilde](#), [TYLIM Natalia](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 7 octobre 2021).

Emma Wilde Botta and Natalia Tylim make the case for why the October 2 Women's March was a missed opportunity for the Left, and how we can build a socialist defense of abortion rights.

Last week, the Democratic Socialists of America's National Socialist Feminist Working Group Steering Committee circulated a statement ahead of the October 2 Women's March in Washington D.C. and across the U.S. They outline the dire attacks on abortion rights and acknowledge the urgency of fighting for reproductive justice. They go on to say, "However, the Socialist Feminist Working Group of the Democratic Socialists of America cannot endorse the Women's March." Their reasons are two-fold. The first is the past controversies involving some of the Women's March leadership, citing "a bias for creating space for cisgender, white women" that leaves out other oppressed people. The second is the scope of the march : they say, "we believe that in order to achieve a non-patriarchal society the capitalist system must be abolished, a view that is not supported by the Women's March organizers."

Everyone should be mobilizing for nation-wide demonstrations to defend our basic rights, but this does not mean the organization that called the day of action is above critique. The Women's March is far from perfect. It is, overall, a liberal coalition that brings together celebrities, Democratic politicians, and a get-out-the-vote message to address gender oppression. Local actions may be organized by individuals who are not in the inner circle but the messaging overall is determined from the top, especially in larger cities. For example, in Los Angeles, Tara Reade was invited and confirmed to speak by a local organizer but the Justice Democrats, who were organizing the Los Angeles action, had Reade removed from the list.

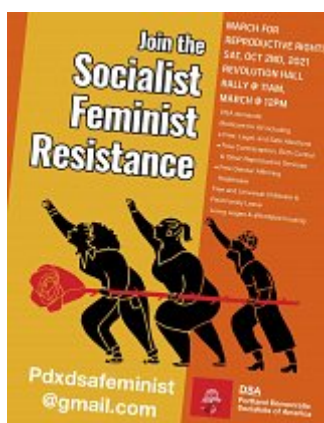
Overall, the Women's March represents a liberal strategy for change, a strategy synonymous with ruling class feminism that has a narrow and exclusive definition of what advancing gender equality looks like. The leadership sees representation, primarily through elections, as a sufficient way to defend abortion and combat racism. They have responded to accusations of being exclusionary by simply including more trans and BIPOC faces in their messaging and as speakers at demonstrations.

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We think that sexism and racism are structural and systemic problems that cannot be addressed by a liberal framework. There is a long history of division and tension between the feminist movement and the Black struggle in the U.S. that must be brought into strategies and discussions about organizing as feminists today. If the feminist movement does not actively foreground how racism shapes the experience of sexism and gender oppression for BIPOC people, the movement will be stilted. But we also think the extent to which these are just white demonstrations is overstated. Some previous left criticisms have concluded that all cis, white women are part of the problem, as opposed to also being oppressed people—many of whom also lack access to abortions—who could be convinced to solidarize with BIPOC people in struggle. In fact, many of the people who showed up on October 2 were far more radical than the national leadership of the Women’s March.

That’s why we are socialist feminists who advocate mass, disruptive action. Even the liberal leadership of the Women’s March recognized the need to be in the streets. We welcome this, especially because relying on the courts to save us is not a winning strategy. The problem isn’t who is calling the marches. The main challenge is the lack of open spaces where different groups can come together to collectively decide, among all those who want to be organizers, how the marches, the messaging, and the plan should come together. This top-down approach to organizing puts a monopoly on decision-making power.

By abstaining from the marches, we forgo the opportunity to pose an alternative to the liberal BS from the front of the march. If we don’t help build spaces for new people to protest and take action, we are missing the chance to raise more radical demands, engage with people, and try to convince them to broaden their conception of gender liberation. In the process of struggle, many people will change their own ideas. Some local DSA chapters, such as Chicago [\[1\]](#), Birmingham, and Portland, are showing what that looks like.



Source : *twitter @PortlandDSA*

Socialist feminists cannot withhold our participation until we have a perfect movement. In fact, no abortion rights, feminist, or gender liberation movement will be led by socialist feminists alone. Mass movements, by definition, include people with an array of ideas. When we look to movements that won abortion rights in Argentina and Mexico, we see that they include left, liberal, centrist, and socialist wings. What differs from the U.S., of course, is that they have figured out how to build movement organizations that are more democratic. A mass movement around defending abortion access should be just that—open to anyone and everyone who wants to fight around that issue, while

also clarifying disagreements between participating forces. People do not need to be socialists to organize around defending Roe v. Wade, but some people will become socialists through that experience.

The Working Group statement points to this potential, saying, “[The march] provides an opportunity for our members who are interested in attending to spread socialist ideas and have a dialogue with attendees who may be sympathetic to the socialist feminist cause.” However, they conclude, “the Working Group cannot say in good faith that socialist feminism will be fought for at the march.” It certainly won’t be when the Socialist Feminist Working Group of the largest socialist organization in the U.S. doesn’t participate.

This is the first statement by the Working Group that we know of since the Texas abortion ban. Rather than set out a positive case for what socialists can do to protect people’s access to bodily autonomy, it takes an abstentionist approach at a crucial moment. The Working Group’s only national call to action is to donate to abortion funds. This is good, but it is insufficient. We need socialist feminists urgently calling every person who wants to defend Roe v. Wade into collective activity in the streets, outside our clinics, and at far right demonstrations, where the forces of reaction recruit and train anti-abortion vigilantes [2].

We should jump at the opportunity to be part of a national day of action. Exactly three years ago, DSA did just that when we called a week of action [3] over the appointment of sexual assaulter Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. That’s why we support this letter that calls on DSA to build a movement to defend abortion rights. As an organization, we need mechanisms for membership to shape national priorities as events unfold. A referendum process [4] would allow us to democratically decide the priorities of the organization at these crucial moments.

The Working Group statement didn’t make or break the Women’s March to defend abortion access, but it was revealing about the current orientation of socialist feminists in the U.S. We are working on a longer retrospective piece on the #MeToo phenomenon and the politics of the socialist feminist movement. To be frank, this type of analysis feels like a minefield. But it’s one that we, as socialist feminists, have to navigate at some point because there are no simple solutions to how to build the movement for our rights and the stakes are way too high not to have the conversations.

Natalia Tylim and Emma Wilde Botta

P.-S.

• Tempest. Posted October 7, 2021 :
<https://www.tempestmag.org/2021/10/alone-in-a-crowd/>

Notes

[1] https://chicago.suntimes.com/2021/10/2/22706064/chicago-abortion-rights-rally-defend-access-texas-ban?fbclid=IwAR3m2b4ElRguXzg_79UWt--nX7-wULkPXHTKylecAYnP4a-cd3g1Ykk8tIA

[2] <https://www.tempestmag.org/2020/12/anti-abortion-politics-are-far-right-politics/>

[3] <https://www.dsausa.org/news/unleash-your-fury-dsa-stop-kavanaugh-week-of-action/>

[4] <https://www.tempestmag.org/2021/07/why-referendum-and-recall/>