

<https://npa31.org/spip.php?article4842>



Women's Marches

Women's Marches: from protest to movement?

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV504 - January 2017 -

Publication date: Tuesday 24 January 2017

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights
reserved**

“Over the next months and years we will be called upon to intensify our demands for social justice, to become more militant in our defense of vulnerable populations. Those who still defend the supremacy of white male hetero-patriarchy had better watch out.

“The next 1,459 days of the Trump administration will be 1,459 days of resistance: Resistance on the ground, resistance in the classrooms, resistance on the job, resistance in our art and in our music.

“This is just the beginning and in the words of the inimitable Ella Baker, ‘We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.’ Thank you.” This was Angela Davis concluding her remarks at the Women's March on Washington on 21 January 2017. (For the full transcript see below the article.)

The worldwide women's marches on 21 January 2017 were a historic event.

– For the first time since the anti-war demonstrations of 15 February 2003, millions of people in different countries and on all seven continents demonstrated on the same day and for the same reasons, both in a gesture of international solidarity but also an understanding how the same political dynamics are at play internationally. [\[1\]](#)

– In the US the level of mobilization outstripped the 2003 anti-war demonstrations and in Britain rivalled that level.

– The marches were initiated and led by and mobilized majoritarily women. While the spark was the election of Trump as US president and reaction to the announced and probable attacks on women's rights in that country under his administration, the international response was also provoked by the attacks and fears of attacks on those same rights by women around the world. The rising tides of far right and religious reaction are underlining the fact that women's rights – to choose, to work, to live their lives as they wish – are never definitely won.

– While the impetus came from women – of all ages, women of colour, ethnic minority women, migrant women, women with disabilities – defending their rights, the marches also mobilized those concerned by the attacks to come from the Trump administration – and similar political forces around the world – on migrants' rights, on Black rights, on the environment.

– In the US the mobilization had a truly mass nature – as is witnessed by the list of mobilizations that has been compiled. [\[2\]](#) Even the protests of a few dozen, indeed sometimes a few individuals, are recorded, showing the extent to which the desire to stand up and be counted against Trump and his policies sank deep.

Of course such a spontaneous mobilization was extremely heterogeneous, bringing into the same marches radical feminists, Democrats and Clinton supporters, Black rights activists, radical anticapitalist left forces.... That was an enormous achievement notably in the US, but also at a worldwide level.

Some left commentators because of this have tended to dismiss the significance of these demonstrations, arguing that they were dominated by bourgeois, white, liberal, pro-Democrat forces. That such forces were present and may well have taken the initiative is undeniable. But all the reports from around the world underline the fact that many,

Women's Marches: from protest to movement?

many of the demonstrators were young, spontaneous and new to mobilizing. What could be a worse tactic for the diverse feminist, anti-capitalist left than to leave those people only in dialogue with liberal, mainstream, institutional feminists? As Susan Pashkoff writing for *Socialist Resistance* in Britain says: *It is essential that socialist feminists and the left participate in this movement and not just criticise from the outside. We need to be there, shifting the boundaries further to the left, to support the demands of working class women, women of colour, LGBTQ comrades and disabled women. We need to make certain that this potential movement is not seized by those that would subvert its aims to further the needs of mainstream political parties and the liberal feminist movement.* [3]

The need for the marches to be of all women, and in particular those that suffer, and have suffered, the most sharply from oppression, exploitation and discrimination, that is Black and ethnic minority women, LGBTQ people, disabled women, working-class women, was expressed strongly from the outset. The “Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles” in the US were far broader than those of liberal feminism and addressed the demands and struggles of women of colour and working class women. [4] Real efforts were made to ensure that the organizers (co-chairs) [5] at a national level in the US reflected this diversity, but as with any living movement such efforts will have to continue if an ongoing movement is to develop out of this surge of protest.

Pashkoff pointed out “If you expect this nascent movement to understand the fact that it is at the intersections of race, class and gender that women’s oppression is felt the hardest, then we need to be there ensuring that the voices of women of colour, working class women, LGBTQ people, and disabled women are heard and their demands are taken on board. It is a nascent movement, if you expect that they will not make errors or put out wrong slogans, you are asking far too much.” Nevertheless the movement, if it is to grow in to the powerful protest movement for social justice called for by Angela Davis in her speech in Washington, will have to go beyond this organized diversity to become an expression of the fights and struggles of women against all forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination. [6]

But movements take time and effort to grow and to build. As the Marxist feminist author Cinzia Arruzza wrote on 22 January:

Mass mobilizations almost never begin when we expect them, almost never have the features we would expect or consider as politically adequate, almost never have political coherence, they are not free of the social contradictions and divisions that are present in society, or of the cultural prejudices and political shortcomings that characterize them. They are not magical events disconnected from the continuum of social life, although they have the capacity and potentiality of creating discontinuity and breaks. They are messy, contradictory processes, where the outcomes are not given in advance and solidarity is something to be achieved. The last 48 hours have shown the potentiality for a new season of mass mobilization, and that this happened especially in a day of women's mobilizations is even more relevant. Of course, a possible, perhaps likely, scenario is that the Democratic Party and its surrogates will end up taming, coopting and eventually kill this potentiality. But the relevant decision we should make is whether we want to already sing the funeral eulogy of a mobilization that could be or whether we want to be true to our desire to change this world and have a serious non-moralistic political analysis of the limitations, composition and potential of these last two days, and of what we should do and how in order to help the growth and radicalization of the struggle. [7]

That is the challenge facing feminist, anti-capitalist forces in the US and around the world in the wake of this wave of protest. What is at stake, and also the possibilities opened up, are undoubtedly greater in the immediate in the US. But as women around the world fight to defend and extend their rights, this protest movement is a sign of the possibilities to build their own movements, whether for the right to abortion in Ireland and Poland, against violence in India and South Africa, against feminicide in Mexico and for women's rights as human rights everywhere.

History cannot be deleted like web pages

Civil rights activist Angela Davis spoke at the Women's March on Washington on Saturday in front of a crowd of hundreds of thousands who gathered in the nation's capital to protest the Trump administration. Davis, who is known for writing such books as *Women, Race, and Class*, made a passionate call for resistance and asked the audience to become more militant in their demands for social justice over the next four years of Trump's presidency.

Here's the Full Transcript Of Angela Davis's Women's March Speech

"At a challenging moment in our history, let us remind ourselves that we the hundreds of thousands, the millions of women, trans-people, men and youth who are here at the Women's March, we represent the powerful forces of change that are determined to prevent the dying cultures of racism, hetero-patriarchy from rising again."We recognize that we are collective agents of history and that history cannot be deleted like web pages. We know that we gather this afternoon on indigenous land and we follow the lead of the first peoples who despite massive genocidal violence have never relinquished the struggle for land, water, culture, their people. We especially salute today the Standing Rock Sioux.

"The freedom struggles of black people that have shaped the very nature of this country's history cannot be deleted with the sweep of a hand. We cannot be made to forget that black lives do matter. This is a country anchored in slavery and colonialism, which means for better or for worse the very history of the United States is a history of immigration and enslavement. Spreading xenophobia, hurling accusations of murder and rape and building walls will not erase history."No human being is illegal.

"The struggle to save the planet, to stop climate change, to guarantee the accessibility of water from the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux, to Flint, Michigan, to the West Bank and Gaza. The struggle to save our flora and fauna, to save the air—this is ground zero of the struggle for social justice."This is a women's march and this women's march represents the promise of feminism as against the pernicious powers of state violence. And inclusive and intersectional feminism that calls upon all of us to join the resistance to racism, to Islamophobia, to anti-Semitism, to misogyny, to capitalist exploitation.

"Yes, we salute the fight for 15. We dedicate ourselves to collective resistance. Resistance to the billionaire mortgage profiteers and gentrifiers. Resistance to the health care privateers. Resistance to the attacks on Muslims and on immigrants. Resistance to attacks on disabled people. Resistance to state violence perpetrated by the police and through the prison industrial complex. Resistance to institutional and intimate gender violence, especially against trans women of color."Women's rights are human rights all over the planet and that is why we say freedom and justice for Palestine. We celebrate the impending release of Chelsea Manning. And Oscar López Rivera. But we also say free Leonard Peltier. Free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Free Assata Shakur.

"Over the next months and years we will be called upon to intensify our demands for social justice to become more militant in our defense of vulnerable populations. Those who still defend the supremacy of white male hetero-patriarchy had better watch out."The next 1,459 days of the Trump administration will be 1,459 days of resistance: Resistance on the ground, resistance in the classrooms, resistance on the job, resistance in our art and in our music.

"This is just the beginning and in the words of the inimitable Ella Baker, 'We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.' Thank you."

Angela Davis

[1] Many photos, videos and articles have reported on the demonstrations. For a taste see *The Huffington Post* "[38 Stunning Photos From Women's Marches Around The World](#)".

[2] See [here](#).

[3] Susan Pashkoff, *Socialist Resistance*, "[Are we witnessing a moment or a movement?](#)". See on the routes proposed for the movement: "May the angry women return home the day after the march to lead us toward a women-led hybrid movement-party in every state that is disciplined enough to govern, militantly local and single-mindedly devoted to actualizing a force capable of seizing control of city councils and mayorships during midterm elections across America in preparation for an electoral coup against the presidency in 2020.", Micah White, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2017, "[Without a path from protest to power, the Women's March will end up like Occupy](#)". Experiences as varied as those of the PT in municipal government in Brazil and Podemos in th Spanish state have shown that it is not so easy to wield "power" even at a municipal level.

[4] See the "Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles" [here](#).

[5] See [here](#).

[6] The organizers have understood this point and are addressing it in their fashion, see Susan Chira and Jonathan Martin, 22 January 2017 *New York Times*, "[After Success of Women's March, a Question Remains: What's Next?](#)".

[7] Cinzia Arruzza is author of "Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism" available [here](#).