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Abortions rights USA

The Fight for Abortion and Reproductive Justice after Roe

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Spectre Journal (USA) recently hosted an event for donors about global lessons for the struggle for abortion rights and reproductive justice after the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade. The panel included Camila Valle, Sherry Wolf, Emily Janakiram, and Holly Lewis. This is an edited transcript of their speeches and wrap ups after the discussion.

Camila Valle: I know people are probably thinking about what just happened to our right to abortion and reproductive healthcare in the US, which other speakers will go into tonight, but I wanted to start with a historic victory in a different part of the world: that of the Argentinian abortion movement, which won legalization at the end of 2020—and not just legalization, but free abortion as part of their socialized healthcare system.

I don't have time to go into the full history of the fight—I have an essay in the latest issue of Spectre that goes deeper into this history for those interested—so instead I wanted to touch on two main points that I think are crucial in thinking about the lessons we can draw on and be inspired by as we begin a new phase in the fight for abortion and reproductive justice in this country.

First, I want to argue that the Argentinian abortion movement's building of its own infrastructures was critical for its victory. I think there's a tendency on the left in the US, at least one that I have felt, especially when it comes to the issue of abortion, to counterpose the building of independent infrastructures, which often provide direct material and affective support, such as helping people get abortions, and the idea that we should demand things from the state (i.e., our right to abortion codified into law). The experience of Argentina, as well as that of other countries such as Mexico, actually shows that you can't do one without the other.

In Argentina, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion was extremely multifaceted: there was of course the legislative aspect that folks may be most familiar with—they presented their bill to the government for debate and voting many many times over the course of years, until it was finally passed and became law—but there was also so much more, and I don't think we would have seen that victory without these other components. To name some examples, there were networks that distributed abortion pills, that accompanied people through their abortions, there were networks that taught medical professionals how to perform abortions since it wasn't part of their formal training, there were networks of teachers who developed comprehensive sex education curricula, artists and journalists and photographers who debuted public exhibitions about abortion, there were mass tablings, marches, occupying workplaces, bringing the issue to the unions, going out into the streets, and whole systems in place for mass meetings, assemblies, etc., to discuss the campaign, demands, and have political debates.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore said about abolition: "it requires that we change one thing: everything." And I think that's a very useful sentiment and one that the Argentinian movement really lived up to in its own way. Every single place, every single platform, every single person became a tool to raise public awareness around the issue, to raise the organizational level of our side, and to strengthen the fight.

Abortion is so stigmatized in society, it is a source of so much shame and guilt, it is not something we are often taught about, it is kept from us, and we have to take seriously that part of our role is to make everything about abortion and abortion about everything.

To win a demand like the legalization of abortion, on such a scale, the state has to feel that it is in its own interest to concede our demands—that what would happen if they didn't would be much worse. And part of that is showing that

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we don't need them and, actually, if they want to remain relevant, if they want to have any control over the situation, they need to give us what we want.

I think this is fundamentally tied to a certain understanding of how people radicalize, particularly around this issue. People join the movement through personal experiences and collective struggle, people change their minds through collective struggle. People's horizons about what is possible are raised. The idea that somehow we will be able to do all that without talking about the specificities of abortion and, frankly, without engaging with and helping people seeking abortions—which is an argument I have heard—I think is a failing strategy. It's not the only thing we should do, of course, but it should be an important part of what we do.

This brings me to the second point I wanted to touch on briefly, which is the development, generalization, and integration of demands around abortion within and into the broader left in Argentina.

In the 1980s, after the overthrow of the civic-ecclesiastical-military dictatorship, Argentina went through a process of formal democratization, which the feminist movement was very much part of in its own way, including a sector that was focused on abortion. In the context of this period of popular participation and activity to rebuild the country, there was a society-wide mobilization of human rights organizations, unions, LGBTQ groups, student movements, etc., and by the end of the 1990s, abortion started to develop a different kind of profile, thanks in large part due to these coalitions and collective experiences of political development.

In 2001, the country experienced a profound economic and political crisis that precipitated a new chapter of struggle in Argentinian society—for democracy and against traditional political parties, politicians in general, austerity, and the external debt. During this period, neighborhood assemblies were built and they functioned both as mutual aid networks and as political organizing spaces.

An abortion assembly was also created by parts of the feminist movement, and it was through this experience that abortion was able to move out of its silo. Abortion activists, who were involved in the abortion assembly, brought abortion to the fore of every single meeting, action, and so on, and established itself in each one of the other assemblies. At a certain point, the abortion movement became fully integrated into all the other assemblies and movements and it was no longer really necessary to have just one specific grouping raise the question of abortion. Abortion became a pillar of all the fronts and all the coalitions—just as everybody had to be against the external debt, austerity, discrimination, everybody had to be for abortion.

To close, I want to end with what I think is one of the key lessons in this: that collective experiences of democratization can help bring marginalized issues like abortion to the fore, both in society more broadly and within the left in particular. We should ask ourselves, as people who identify as being on the left, if we count certain movements, certain organized groups of people who do a lot of great work, as part of the left, with us? And why or why not? What are the political and strategic implications of this?

Sherry Wolf: I'm really glad that we started on such a positive note from Cami about how activists in Argentina led a struggle from dictatorship to democracy and then a massive victory for reproductive justice. She brought together the experience in a real way, showing how mutual aid was politicized and political organizing was tied to aid.

For my remarks, I was asked to talk about some of the lessons of the eighties and nineties. I want to forefront three key points to hammer home about that period of the abortion wars. One, I think that there was never a heyday of a united reproductive justice movement.

It has always been a struggle riven with divisions and debates among left and moderate and right wings that have

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had to battle it out occasionally uniting in explosive actions, but more often dividing over issues of race and class and strategy.

Second, when the left has argued and organized for a strategy and tactics of agitation and direct action and confrontation with anti-choice bigots and people who attack our bodily autonomy, it created a bridge for new activists to join our side, we made gains and marginalized the right.

And lastly, our movement is in an abusive relationship with the Democratic Party, whose elected leaders, including many who identify as progressives have really been selling out the left, women, trans people, and gender nonconforming people for decades. And I believe like all abusive relationships, it must end.

I came of age in the early eighties, just as the left went into precipitous decline. I don't think it was a causal connection, but they were synchronous. The huge upheavals and the movements of the late sixties and early seventies were in the rear view mirror. Almost the entirety of the US left had entered the Democrats via the Jesse Jackson Rainbow Coalition and his successive campaigns for president in 84 and again in 88. Jackson functioned in obviously similar ways to Bernie Sander in 2016 and 2020. Jackson, of course, did not build the profile of socialism, which Sanders did. But like Sanders, once Jackson lost in the primaries he threw his support for the Democrats' nominees. In doing so he brought the thousands of enthusiastic left wing campaign activists behind first Walter Mondale and later Michael Dukakis—about whom nothing interesting has ever been said.

I give you that as a *mise-en-scène* because it frames what was happening during the 1989 to '92 period. That's where you see the contrast between losing and winning strategies. Those years were a pivotal moment. In the late eighties and early nineties, there was a wave of far-right activism against reproductive services at precisely the same time as queer activists were taking to the streets to fight for access to HIV and AIDS research, drugs, and resources from a hostile federal government.

I was active in New York's ACT UP in those years. Queers were very much under siege then as now. The rights of LGBTQ+ people and our rights to bodily autonomy were under attack at the same time as abortion came under assault. So, the Right in this country, then just as now, was responding to our militant assertion of control over our bodies and our health.

The anti-abortion movement was largely led by white men in groups like Operation Rescue. It was led by Randall Terry, a 20-something used car salesman, I kid you not, from upstate New York who built a dedicated and fanatical following of violent misogynists and racists. There's no other way to describe Operation Rescue.

Between 1977 and 1989, 77 family planning clinics were firebombed, 117 were targets of arson, 250 received bomb threats, 31 were invaded by the bigots, and more than 200 were vandalized. As one of the popular chants of our clinic defense movement said, they "pray by day bomb by night, that's the tactic of the right to life." Not an exact rhyme, but the meter works.

The Right's tiny minority really stood in stark contrast to the ideas about abortion and women held by the majority of people at the time. Then, like today, an unwavering majority supported Roe in every region of the country, among every age group, both political parties, and even inside of the Catholic church.

Nevertheless, abortion rights hung in the balance during George Bush Sr.'s administration. When the Supreme Court was considering *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* in 1989, half a million people traveled to Washington DC and marched and demonstrated in support of abortion rights and reproductive service access. That really made a difference in the Court's decision to preserve abortion rights. When Roe was widely perceived as about to be

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reversed, they stood back from the abyss.

So mass action not only galvanized public consciousness on a mass scale, but it also tipped the decision making of the Court in our favor. It was clear to the Court that they would have no legitimacy in the eyes of the American public if they ruled the way the Right wanted them to.

Even though the Right in the form of Operation Rescue ideologically lost in the Court, it was not going to give up. They actually went on the offensive and did so effectively in Wichita, Kansas in 1991. They laid siege to a city in which none of the prevailing organizations, not the National Organization for Women, not Planned Parenthood, not National Abortion Rights Action League, which is what it was known as at that time before it became NARAL Pro-Choice America. When Operation Rescue declared their “Summer of Mercy,” most of the progressive organizations, the liberal organizations, the NGOs, and service providers like Planned Parenthood argued against any kind of mobilization and to rely on court injunctions instead.

There were no protests. As a result, the clinics were shut down for weeks in Wichita. The Far Right was emboldened and planned more such sieges of cities and clinics. That was a wake-up call for a lot of us on the left. We established networks to prepare a response. So, when they announced in January of 1992 that they were going to lay siege to Buffalo, we went into motion.

There were key groups like Women’s Health Action Mobilization (WHAM!) in New York City, which was basically an offshoot of ACT UP NY. I was a part of both of them, as were others. Both ACT UP and WHAM! mobilized alongside socialists and others that formed groups like Reproductive Rights National Network and Buffalo United for Choice. Through all these various networks, thousands of people converged on Buffalo to defend the clinics against the Right.

I will never forget the image of gay men in drag beating the right wing bigots with their purses and shoes. They were the drag guerrilla action group Church Ladies for Choice, whose motto was, “we are for free abortion on demand and practical shoes.” That was perhaps one of the lighter moments in what was in fact a pitched battle between the Left and Right.

There were fights that took place outside of the clinics. There were confrontations that hundreds of people took part in, and we won. It was recognized in all the newspapers. All the headlines about it told the truth; no clinics were closed, and no doctors were driven out of the abortion business. Mainstream Buffalo turned its back on operation rescue.

After our victory in Buffalo, people started to refer to Operation Rescue as Operation Fizzle. Really it was, it was a really a tremendous victory for our side. After that, we would go out into the streets and chant against the Right, “Pray, you’ll need it; your cause has been defeated.” It really felt like we had the wind in our sails and we were confident to take on the Right.

When the Democratic Party planned to hold their convention in New York City that summer to nominate Bill Clinton, the right wing said they were going to embarrass the Democrats and lay siege to New York City’s clinics. But now we had the wherewithal to mobilize against the wishes of the leadership of the Democratic Party and protest against the Right. I don’t have the time to get into a detailed account of the promises and the betrayals of the Democrats. I think a lot of the people here already know them—from false promises to sign a Freedom of Choice Act to codify abortion into US law by both Clinton and Obama to the decades of voting to deny federal funding to get access to abortion, and on and on. The fact is that expecting to advance reproductive justice through the Democrats has been proven a failed and bankrupt strategy time and again.

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On the other hand, small groups of leftists, not just socialists, but others including anarchists, and radicals in groups like ACT UP and WHAM!, came together and were able to mobilize to change mass consciousness, keep the clinics open and shift the balance of power.

Today, we need to learn the negative lessons of a failed orientation on the Democrats and the positive lessons of mass strategic action and organizing to figure out how to build a new movement for reproductive justice.

We have the numbers on our side to build mass defiance, not retreat into the underground, but resistance to turn this back. We were able to do this before and they've done it in other countries coming from much more harsh conditions. We have had nearly 50 years of abortion and tens of millions have had a legal and safe abortion. We have to fight this. Clearly nobody's coming to save us, but us. It's time to get serious about organizing a new resistance to unjust laws.

Emily Janakiram: This week we've seen one of the most heinous rollbacks of our rights in the last fifty years—the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the two Supreme Court cases which established that abortion is part of a constitutionally protected right to privacy and barred states from outlawing it. We now have total or near-total bans on abortion in twenty-six states. The right now has their eyes on a federal abortion ban, and the Clarence Thomas' opinion calls on the court to strike down protections for birth control, homosexuality, and same sex marriage.

In recent years, the sort of re-branded anti-abortion movement has distanced themselves from outright saying they want abortion patients to be imprisoned, instead claiming that “abortion is a form of violence against women”, that pregnant people are being duped and preyed upon by “the abortion industrial complex”, and the most dangerous place for a Black child is the womb. Of course, this is nothing more than PR.

America is one of the most dangerous and expensive places in the world to give birth and to raise a child, particularly for impoverished Black and Brown people who will be the most severely affected by these bans. This is only going to get worse, as people are forced to carry high-risk pregnancies such as ectopic pregnancies and healthcare providers choose to let pregnant people die rather than risk jail for performing an abortion.

In the states where abortion is now illegal, self-managed abortion is also criminalized and in some cases, the patient giving themselves an abortion subject to criminal charges. It will be Black and Brown people, Indigenous people, and undocumented people who will be disproportionately impacted by police violence for attempting to perform their own abortions. The police are the most trusted weapons of the state in violently protecting capital and profit.

If you think about what Marxist feminists have been saying for a long time now—that birthing and raising children is labor, labor on which capitalism depends—then the criminalization of abortion is a form of strike-breaking in the face of declining birth rates, as more and more people are refusing to perform this labor under such barbaric and dangerous conditions. And of course, the police have always been an essential tool in strike breaking.

This is what they mean by “it's not your body,” which is something we hear at clinic defenses a lot – most notably, in a video that went viral on social media of a young man in a “America First” hat yelling “Not your body. Your body is mine, and you're having my baby.” Our bodies exist to produce workers and to create profits. This is why we also anticipate that birth control will be next on the chopping block, as the right positions hormonal birth control, the morning after pill, and the copper IUD as “abortifacients.”

These days abortion rights organizers these days refrain from using coat-hanger imagery or bloody violent imagery because such imagery casts abortion as inherently dangerous and violent, which is a right-wing talking point.

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Self-managed abortions can absolutely be done safely, especially with the advent of the abortion pill. Self-managed abortions are safer than, for instance, home births. If we are afraid of clinic closures and a return to dangerous back-alley abortions which will kill pregnant people, we need to remember that it is the police who have always made these abortions so dangerous.

I was at an SMA training that said patients shouldn't take the abortion pill vaginally because it can be detected. It is the threat of imprisonment that keeps abortion seekers isolated, afraid, and unaware of the resources that do exist to help people safely self-manage abortions as well as travel to obtain them. However, the criminalization of "aiding and abetting abortion" will ensure that safe self-managed abortions become dangerous and traumatic, that information and resources to perform them safely will remain inaccessible, and that abortion seekers will have no one to turn to and no one to help them, except for the most brazen and unscrupulous of opportunists.

This ruling comes as the police have unprecedented powers of surveillance and detention, especially with the kind of unholy alliance of big tech and police. We're already seeing platforms like Instagram removing mentions of the word "abortion." The police – or really, any kind of anti-choice vigilantes with a credit card – have the power to check your search history, your text messages and emails, your period tracker apps to spy on people who may be getting abortions. Njera Keith and Kristina Brown, two Black reproductive organizers with the group 400 and 1 in Arizona, were just arrested for distributing abortion resources and information to their communities. This is why each and every one of us needs to be prepared to "aid and abet abortion." Though of course we cannot blithely accept the closure of clinics as a foregone conclusion. They must not only be defended, but expanded to meet unmet demand. Aspiration abortion in clinics remains an essential demand, and one that ought to be a center piece for struggle ahead.

One of the reasons the Right has been so successful in mobilizing their base around abortion rights is that they've recognized abortion as inherently political and recognized its centrality to the sociopolitical agenda they're trying to actualize. They've recognized that abortion on-demand has the power to weaken the patriarchal, capitalist state. The right has returned to nineties style tactics of clinic harassment and clinic invasions. Many Operation Rescue figures, like Fidelis Moscinski, are active in what is now called "Red Rose Rescue."

Across the country, Red Rose Rescuers storm the waiting rooms of abortion clinics and give roses to patients who are waiting for their appointments in an attempt to shame and intimidate them. In New York City, the Archdiocese of New York hosts Witness for Life, a city-wide campaign of clinic harassment which hosts Fidelis as a figurehead, where antis march to a nearby Planned Parenthood. There is a sizable cop presence at these actions, not to help patients enter the clinic safely, but to escort and insulate the antis. We often witness them talking and joking with the antis amicably, even as they march right up to the clinic doors.

The Archdiocese isn't the only such group in New York—Love Life, an evangelical group which carries out clinic harassment campaigns across the country, opened an office here about two years ago. The anti-abortion right calls New York "the abortion capital of the world," and encourages their base to travel here to "the heart of the evil." We can anticipate that, as New York and other liberal cities become "Abortion sanctuaries" now that Roe has been overturned, these groups will start traveling here with greater numbers and aggressiveness. They are well-funded and well-mobilized.

It's no coincidence that this ruling comes after waves of unprecedented labor organizing, tenant organizing, and anti-police organizing that most of us haven't seen before in our lifetimes. This isn't about *The Handmaid's Tale* or anything, it's about class struggle. If we're going to win free abortion on demand, we need to similarly position abortion- not "choice"- as an unapologetic good and an essential component of our liberation from the ruling class, as central to our struggle as workers. As Cami mentioned it takes both mutual aid efforts, like supporting abortion funds and distributing abortion pills as well as a mass movement of civil disobedience, strikes, sit-ins, walkouts, as the

abortion struggle was won before across the globe.

Holly Lewis: I'm going to give historical overview of reproductive organizing in Texas in the past few decades. Hopefully this will help synthesize some of what others have said into a Texas context that might lead to political assessments and solutions rooted in regional particulars.

In 2009, I was involved in the creation of a group called Project ABC (All Bodies Count) in Austin, Texas. The point of the group was to organize around the idea of bodily autonomy as a political issue, bringing together abortion rights activism and trans activism, particularly trans activism surrounding access to competent medical care. We organized to fight for abortion rights for trans and gender nonconforming folks, as well as for cis women. And we wanted to educate everyone including doctors about trans issues and needs.

At the time, no one in the medical field, from general practitioners to Planned Parenthood, were culturally competent when talking to trans and non-binary people. When I asked my own doctor about the competency of other doctors about trans issues on a scale of 1-10, he said, "Zero or less than zero." One of the few doctors in town who billed herself as oriented towards trans care, routinely misgendered and deadnamed clients. Already then, we were preparing people for what to do if Roe fell, how to find abortion services, and how to access basic healthcare, just as we were trying to figure out ways to get people access to trans health care. We were forced then to do what Cami addressed and that is combine fighting for abortion care and helping people get abortion care. This particular group dissolved in the debate around those questions. But there was a ton of energy around queer and trans politics at the time in Texas and it was always tied to reproductive struggle. In Texas, I don't think you can disentangle queer and trans politics from abortion politics. From the right-wing perspective, we're all a big lumped up threat to a particular type of family, to a particular gender regime.

Then in 2013, there was a fightback against what was called "The Texas War on Women". The Republicans were voting to impose extreme regulations on abortion, which would – and did – close many clinics. After that summer the number of clinics in Texas dropped from two dozen to five. To stop it from passing, Democratic Party state senator Wendy Davis filibustered the legislature and became an icon of the Texas movement. This was, of course, very frustrating for those of us who were socialists because we knew the Democrats would siphon the momentum and donations from the movement into some sort of doomed strategy...

Activists responded to Davis's filibuster by physically occupying the capitol building for a week. That's where the real history was made. It's very difficult for me to imagine this now because, comparatively, it's been crickets since Roe fell. But it was a really spirited fight. People were confident, inspired, and determined to win. When the state police told us we couldn't bring tampons into the building, we just threw tampons everywhere to the point where they banned tampons and they searched us for tampons when we went through the metal detector. There was a festive, spirited atmosphere. It felt like we had all the momentum. Like we were bound to win.

Then the Democratic Party and Planned Parenthood said, "party's over and now we're not going to occupy the capitol anymore, and we have to finish this fight in the courts." When they said this, most of the masses followed their lead. A thousand or so of us stayed, then state police were brought in to crack open heads. There was blood on the shiny terrazzo floor as they dragged people away. After that, we tried to organize, but it was very difficult.

The other thing we encountered was the difficulty activists had at the time making the connection between abortion rights and trans rights and the Black struggle in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and racist police violence, which would later evolve into the Black Lives Matter Movement. We pointed out the connections, but people just didn't get it. What was missing was an argument about violence and bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom under capitalism, and how to build a collective fight. This underscores a point for today. When we don't make the connections between the right's attack on critical race theory, the attacks on trans rights, and the attacks on abortion,

we fail every time.

So where are we now? Nine years later, we have a situation where the Democrats' strategy of relying on Democrats and legal arguments has failed. We now face criminalization. One thing that is not helping us build a united struggle is our public employees union. They are refusing to take an active position on all of this. They're not organizing members to resist or refuse arresting the parents of trans kids. They're not organizing workers around refusal to turn people in for abortions. So that's where we're at. We fail because we're not making the connections between building labor power and fighting oppression. Organized workers could stop this.

Instead, doctors now face a 100 year sentence for performing abortions in Texas with no exceptions for rape or incest. This goes into effect on July 24th. The right has plans to go after anyone outside of the state that interferes with its bans. They are planning to charge doctors in states like New York for aiding and abetting murder if someone gets an abortion at clinic in New York.

One of the things that we need to do is recognize that this is going to be a long fight. But not in the way the Democrats are saying it's going to be a long fight. They say that to lower our expectations. They say, "lower your demands, don't ask for too much." We need to say the opposite. It's going to be a long struggle. So, be prepared to organize and fight for the long term for a whole programme of reproductive justice. We will not win this in a day of getting out into the street. It's going to be a lot of getting out into the street. It's also going to be a lot of types of organizing that are creative and distinct from "out into the street" politics. So, we have to rebuild our networks, build our infrastructure of dissent, and plan for a long-term struggle.

The struggle will look different in different states and regions. The right has managed to send the issue to the states. This creates different conditions and issues in Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana, and New York. The right has created a situation that is uneven by design. So, we need a broad strategy to build a national movement, but we have to be aware of context and differences in our situations.

We need to pay extra attention to particular locations and come up with demands and tactics that address them. Only a national movement that attends to the particularities of each state and that builds solidarity among deeply interrelated attacks on all workers and oppressed people can defeat the right and win reproductive justice.

Wrap Ups

Holly Lewis: I'll try and address some of the issues and themes raised in the discussion. First of all, we have to recognize that we here in Texas have trained doctors who are completely ready and willing to perform abortions and distribute medication. They are standing there in front of patients, turning them away and saying, "you have to go because I'm facing 100 years in prison. I'm facing a life sentence in prison if I give you this abortion right now."

So, training people to give abortions (as is sometimes mentioned as a solution) will not address the problem. The real challenge here is how do we protect health care providers from imprisonment? How do we make sure that they are not arrested or how do we de-arrest them if they are arrested? How do we organize to make sure that doesn't happen? That's our challenge in Texas. That was my point that we will need different strategies and tactics depending on what state we're in—Texas, California, New York, or wherever. In some states and regions, clinics will need to be built. There may be clinics that need to be built on borders. And there might be organizations established to help with such projects.

And we need to be listening to one another. Over the past decade, we've kind of like very quickly naysayed one another. Now, we need to fully hear one another out. I also think we need to talk about the difference between

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building up a movement and winning abortion for the first time and building a movement after losing abortion rights. This is kind of unprecedented. It's the difference between climbing up a mountain together and falling back down a mountain.

So, while we can learn and apply many lessons from our own past and from other countries, we are going to have to be attentive to the particularity of having lost a right. We have to understand how and why we lost it and how we can ensure that we never again suffer such a setback. That entails building a fundamentally more radical movement to win much deeper and more permanent change.

I also want to clarify something that I said about my union. I am not generalizing to the whole union movement. I was speaking very specifically about my union and what it is doing or not doing in Texas. Other unions have taken excellent positions. You would think you could rely on the Texas State Employees Union to help stop the arrest people seeking or providing abortions and also defend service workers from being forced to collaborate with cops separating parents from trans kids or blocking trans people from getting healthcare.

Instead, the union has said, while we oppose all these attacks, we don't want to alienate our members who are anti-abortion and anti-trans. We have to fight to get our union to stand in defense of workers and in solidarity with people who are in the line of attack from the right and the bosses. But the same must not be said of all unions. Some have taken excellent positions.

That's my biggest point. We have to be careful not to overgeneralize from the particular and yet at the same time get an overall picture. If we do this we can build specific fights as part of a general movement for reproductive justice.

Emily Janakiram: In the discussion people expressed a lot of fear and realization about the enormity of the fight we are now in. It's particularly frustrating, when you think that just two summers ago we saw what seemed like an unprecedented mass mobilization against the police. But it was co-opted by the Democrats and kind of frittered away. We have to be on guard and not let this happen again with the emerging movement for reproductive justice.

I want to be hopeful that it's not going to happen this time. First of all, the Democrats are exposed in a way they haven't been before. They have repeatedly promised to defend abortion rights, positioning themselves as our only choice to protect "women's rights", and failed to deliver and failed to even try. As a result, there was real frustration with them that was palpable in the demonstration in New York. We had 20,000 people pour out into the streets voicing disillusionment with the Democrats, challenging the legitimacy of the Supreme Court, and really questioning the whole bourgeois establishment.

I think this is an expression of the kind of consciousness opened up by the pandemic and by the 2020 uprisings. It's also been intensified by increased labor organizing and the huge strike waves that have been in this country. There is a cumulative process of radicalization going on. People are talking about class and about the police in ways that they never have before.

But, again, we are in a serious fight. People have been talking about how this measure is sending us "backwards". But the Supreme Court and the ruling class are actually trying to usher in a new age of control over us. This is a new, horrifying future they are trying to move us into. They are imposing new restrictions on our reproductive freedom that are unprecedented. Their decisions repeal all sorts of our civil rights and also expands the police powers to surveil and control us. And tech companies are joining in all of this, handing over our data to the police.

The last thing I'll say is that abortion rights will be much easier to win when we make people realize that abortion is part of a larger struggle to control our autonomy and our destiny. It is part of a multiracial class struggle. Just as

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Sister Song's essential reproductive justice platform states – we must win the right to free abortion on demand and also the right to have and raise children in safe circumstances. That is part of our right as workers as well as women and all people who can get pregnant.

I want to stay optimistic for a long, hot abortion summer, where we will keep having abortions, keep teaching people how to have abortions, and also have a strike wave the likes of what no one has ever seen. That is my hope and wish that I will be working to see it become reality.

Sherry Wolf: A few quick points. One, let's have a little bit of humility and acknowledge that for a number of years in a lot of parts of this country that are directly impacted there are groups like Sister Song and Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Fund and, of course, New York City for Abortion Rights as well as Chicago for Abortion Rights. We need to collaborate with everyone doing the work.

In that effort, we have to figure out how to combine mutual aid and political organizing and direct action. We need to dynamically politicize service provision and connect activism to service provision. That will strengthen the whole effort to both address people's immediate needs and build a movement capable of winning back a right we have lost and expanding it.

For socialists, we can start to have these conversations and network at Socialism 2022 in Chicago over Labor Day Weekend. Maybe we can use it to help organize a pledge of resistance or a pledge of defiance against abortion bans in this country with people saying that they will spread information about self-managed abortions via pills. We can talk about how to help centralize and coordinate expression and give language to the defiance and organize it.

I also want to say something about Black Lives Matter and its impact. While it as a movement is not now in the streets, it has had a huge impact on people's consciousness and their willingness to organize and fight. There is no doubt that it was part of giving workers at Amazon in Staten Island to organize as well as workers at Starbucks to organize 160 shops.

That said, we cannot expect one summer of mass struggle after four decades of defeat and retreat to transform the empire. It won't and it would be naïve to think so. That rebellion was a key part of the process we are going through, but we have to be sober about our situation. We do not have already existing networks and organizations of any substantial size to mount the struggle we need for the coming years.

One of the problems we face is that the largest organization in the country has largely been absent from the field of battle. And that of course is the DSA. Their members have of course been out, but as an organization it has yet to play a leading role. They are tailing this moment. And that's unfortunate, but it can also change.

The left must raise its game. Tens of millions of people, actually more than a hundred million people, agree with us. We don't have to do the map and figure out mathematically how many of these people need to be mobilized. We need to do things that shift mass consciousness through consistent argument through things like pledges, politics, agitation, propaganda, as well as actions.

Small numbers of people in this circumstance can have an enormous impact. ACT UP, remember, never had an action larger than 7,000 people. But it had an enormous impact on masses of people. It had a strategic orientation and a concentrated number of people committed to do something, despite all their debates and disagreements. I remember those debates! 400 people in a room every Monday night; it was a trial! It was a challenge! But somehow we managed to move things in the right direction.

The Fight for Abortion and Reproductive Justice after Roe

Small, radical voices can shift things. Let it be known, for example, that the demonstration in New York City that Emily talked about was organized by tiny handfuls of far left—NYC for Abortion Rights, Left Voice, Socialist Alternative, and Tempest. Yes, at the last minute Planned Parenthood signed on and emailed out the information about the demonstration.

But the lead, the initiative, was taken by small numbers of the left. It caught the mood and people came out in huge numbers. Because the leadership was the revolutionary left and leftist, it meant that you had trans Black activists who were speaking about taking action, fighting back, resisting, defying, and saying fuck the Supreme Court and not one call “to march today, vote tomorrow, and here’s where you register.” So, radicals shifted the politics of the march.

We have to think in those terms rather than cry in our beers and worry about how small we are. Small cogs move bigger wheels. When you have a strategy and something coherent and consistent that connects with large numbers of people you can galvanize a movement of people looking for what to do.

Camila Valle: I want to build off what Sherry was saying about the role of the left. I agree with her point that the largest socialist organization, the DSA, didn’t lead on this and should have a robust strategy and political analysis of reproductive justice in this country and abortion in particular.

But I also want to underline that leftists should be embedded in reproductive justice work. If you want to take the lead on this question, you have to be doing abortion work. You have to actually know what you are talking about. I say that not to chastise anybody, but to point to the fact that there are a lot of organizations that are already doing this work and it won’t be without challenges to integrate the “traditional” left — which for the most part does not and has not organized around abortion — within that. There will be tensions in that process. Abortion must become more central to the left. Leftists need to know what misoprostol is, they need to know the menstrual cycle. Socialists have to be able to talk about abortion specifically. It is not enough to be a socialist.

I agree with what Emily said about criminalization and the impact and the legacy of the Black Lives Matter movement. Our state institutions are trying to control us as tightly as possible in part as a response to the BLM uprising and the general public consciousness against policing, surveillance, state violence, and the carceral system. Our liberal institutions, particularly the Supreme Court, have lost so much legitimacy. People are actually beginning to talk about abolishing the Supreme Court. It is on us to organize this growing radicalization and fight for reproductive justice and with it a profound transformation of our society.

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