

Socialism from Below, Women's Emancipation, and New Politics

May 13, 2022



Shortly after I arrived at UC Berkeley as a freshman in 1966, I learned about and was entirely won over to the idea(l)s of “socialism from below.” Still I was unsure of what these political ideas meant for my life choices – until I met the newly-burgeoning women’s liberation movement. I felt and saw the shackles of sexism’s permeation of capitalism, how this had shaped my being. Unpacking how the “personal is political” illuminated and articulated so much of my lived-experience as a woman who had qualities dismissed as “unfeminine” and definitely not sexy. My life as a political activist was decided.

My first demonstration for free, safe, abortion on demand was in Fall 1969 . The small group of us that marched through Berkeley streets and to the campus, was as I recall, almost entirely women, mostly White, some but not all youthful. Several of the older women (meaning not undergraduates) had experienced dangerous, illegal abortions. The ad hoc group asked for and received no permission for the march. It was organized through informal networks so as to evade detection until we massed and marched, arms locked.

I was reminded of this personal history when I saw a picture of demonstrations against Supreme Court Justice Alito at his home. Critics who have been silent about abortion clinic bombings, physical threats to doctors and women seeking abortions deride this modest escalation of protest dangerously undemocratic and personally invasive. But rather than delve into their predictable, hypocritical opposition to any way we act on our demand to win control of our bodies, I want to point to an aspect of resistance to overturning Roe vs. Wade that has greatly inspired me as a woman who came of age in a world in which we struggled for and won the legal right to abortion and birth control.

My generation, for all its faults and mistakes which we must scrutinize and acknowledge, did something(s) right, visible in these protests. We see male faces in these demonstrations! That was not the case when we first demanded reproductive freedom, childcare, and equal pay for equal work. In fact, members of Berkeley Women’s Liberation were booed and heckled by male students as we marched through the UC Berkeley campus in Fall 1969. Male comrades were mostly MIA in the

demonstration. Not every face is White in the photo of protests at Alito's home. Acknowledging this shift doesn't absolve us of responsibility for scrutinizing why and how the movement is still crippled by its longstanding complicity with systemic racism. Despite our failures, it is exhilarating for me to see angry young women taking to the streets, being naughty. We have never won the fight for our rights against oppression by being nice. We win by violating the patriarchal, xenophobic, racist, sexist, classist norms of capitalism, and we should transgress these cultural, economic, and political restrictions proudly. The current struggle shows, again, our fight is not just for us but for future generations. I am hopeful we can win, and we must persist and fight smart.

On another personal note, although I intend to continue to write for the *New Politics* print journal and website (and support NP with a subscription and donations – as I hope readers will also do), this is the final piece I will post as a member of the editorial board. I am retiring from the editorial board on June 15, to work on my new book and other political projects. A “perk” of being on the all-volunteer board is those of us who want to can post directly, without review or oversight, as long as we sign the pieces and so use the website as a blog. I wanted my final post as an editorial board member of *NP*, a journal that has conveyed my political ideas since its founding sixty years ago, by Julie and Phyllis Jacobson, whom I knew and adored, to be about passing the baton to new movements and new activists, especially those in the streets now fighting for women's emancipation.

Here's to defeating our oppressors.