

Reports on the Resistance: Millions of Women March Against Trump and His Policies

January 22, 2017



Millions of women around the world marched on Saturday, January 21, to repudiate Republican Donald Trump's presidency, his vulgar and misogynistic language and behavior, and his anti-woman policies. On Trump's first full-day as president, he was greeted in Washington, D.C. by a magnificent pink demonstration of women in protest promising he would face four years of resistance.

[Cet article est également disponible en français.]

In the United States about four million marched in what was one of the largest national protest demonstrations in the country's history, protests that have reawakened the women's movement. While Washington, D.C. was the main march, there were some 700 sister marches—some of hundreds of thousands and many of tens of thousands—in dozens of other cities and towns in the United States and many more on every continent.

“Don't Touch My Pussy or My Rights”

Many women carried signs with messages such as, “Keep your little fingers off my pussy and my rights,” an allusion to Trump's recorded remarks bragging about grabbing women by their genitals. Many of the women and men wore caps dubbed pink “pussy hats,” most of them sewn or knitted by themselves, and chanted slogans such as, “Immigrants welcome here!”

Protestors' placards mostly focused on women's issues, many reading “Nasty woman,” an allusion to a Trump remark about Democratic presidential Hillary Clinton in the presidential debates. Women have adopted Trump's insult as a badge of honor, proud they say to be “nasty women.” Other women and men carried posters, however, had progressive messages on virtually every issue from “Black Lives Matter” on some to “Stop Climate Change” on others.

The march was vocally anti-trump, angry, but also jubilant: women thrilled by the massive outpouring of so many like-minded sisters, and warmly welcoming the men who supported them. Like my daughter-in-law, for many women this was their first protest march ever, having come in buses, cars, and by trains, most in groups of women friends, but some traveling alone to be present.. In conversations some women remarked that they saw this as the beginning of a long fight against Trump his administration, and policies.

In Washington, where I marched with my wife, daughter-in-law and son, half a million people from up and down the East Coast turned out, perhaps 80 percent of the marchers women and 20 percent men. Chatting with the women, these were mostly working class or middle class women who had felt insulted by Trump and wanted to make both a personal and a collective statement. While the Washington march was overwhelmingly a march of white women with some Black participants, another daughter-in-law marching in New York reported that it was perhaps 20 percent Black and Latino there. Marches were also somewhat more diverse in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but despite the fact that the lead organizers of the event were women of color who lead NGOS, the march failed to overcome the historic divide between white feminism and black women.

The Politics of the March

The political atmosphere was overwhelmingly liberal. Most of those protesting were women who had voted for Democrat Clinton and were disappointed in her defeat. One saw in the crowd, signs for Hillary and for out-going president Barack Obama. Others called for the election in 2020 of a woman president, some for liberal Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and others for First Lady Michelle Obama. In the massive sea of liberal feminists, the leftist groups represented a mere drop in the bucket.

Speakers at the DC rally included early feminist leader Gloria Steinem, radical Black intellectual and anti-prison activist Angela Davis, Washington D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, and TV show host and transgender rights activist Janet Mock. They and other speakers condemned Trump and the Republican Party for policies that would take away women's right to abortion, curtail women's access to contraception, as well as dismantling the Affordable Care Act known as Obamacare and restructuring Medicaid, a national care health program for low income families and individuals, both of which would be particularly harmful to women.

The march's political atmosphere reflected the official endorsers: Planned Parenthood, providing reproductive health services to women; the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental organization; Emily's List, an organization that sponsors women political candidates; NARAL Pro-Choice America, an organization that defends women's right to abortion; the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the civil rights organization; the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); 1999 SEIU United Health Care Workers East; Peace is Loud; and MoveOn.Org, a progressive political lobby. The march was also endorsed by hundreds of other mostly feminist organizations.

Some labor unions, most important the American Federation of Teachers and the Service Employees International Union, had sponsored the protest, and the United Auto Workers, the United Steel Workers and other unions were also present in small numbers, though there was not much of a sense of an organized labor presence.

America's women have taken the lead in launching the resistance to Trump with their tremendous angry, joyful and moving demonstration. They know as we know this is only the beginning of what will be a long and difficult four years and that the massing of the troops to march is only the prelude to the battle. And if the movement continues to be dominated by liberal politics, it will not be able to achieve its goals, which only a radical reordering of our society can accomplish.