

Mobilize the working class in defense of abortion rights

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Many thousands will march and rally across the US on Tuesday in “Stop the Bans” protests to defend the right to an abortion. The demonstrations are a response to an unprecedented assault on this critical democratic right at both the federal and state level. They reflect the broad support in the population for the right of women to choose.

Donald Trump has pledged to make the overturning of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that banned states from outlawing abortions a central plank of his reelection campaign. Since his inauguration 26 months ago, anti-abortion legislation has been passed in 16 states.

Just since January, four states—Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi and Ohio—have enacted “fetal heartbeat” laws that ban abortion after the sixth week of pregnancy. The sole purpose of these laws is to block the vast majority of abortions, since few women are even certain they are pregnant only six weeks after conception.

The attack was stepped up last week. On Wednesday, Alabama enacted the most onerous law yet. It imposes a prison term of up to 99 years on any doctor who performs an abortion except to save the life of a pregnant woman. On Friday, Missouri passed its own law banning abortions after eight weeks of pregnancy, imposing prison sentences of up to 15 years on doctors who violate its terms.

Like many of these laws, a measure introduced in Texas defines life as beginning with conception, potentially making every woman who receives an abortion a candidate for death row. In Louisiana, Democratic Governor John Bel Edwards said on Thursday that he will sign a “heartbeat” bill when it comes to his desk.

All these laws violate *Roe v. Wade* and subsequent

Supreme Court abortion rights decisions and will be challenged in court and likely blocked, setting up a showdown on the Supreme Court. No one should believe that this institution of the capitalist state, with its far-right, anti-abortion majority, can be relied on to protect this right. The five-member ultra-right majority on the Supreme Court is looking for an opportunity to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, despite the perfunctory statements made by four of the five during their confirmation hearings that *Roe* was a settled precedent.

These state laws are acts of medieval barbarism. Their consequences, should they be upheld by the courts, would be to force women seeking abortions into back-alley procedures at greatly increased risk of death or mutilation. This danger will face working class women especially, since wealthier women will be able to travel to other states to have the procedure.

Beyond the legal counterrevolution against *Roe* is the withdrawal of social support for women seeking an abortion. According to the Guttmacher Institute, 90 percent of all US counties have no abortion provider. In seven American states, there is only a single abortion provider in the entire state. Alabama has only three. Even a large, densely populated Midwest state like Ohio has only 10, down from 45 in 1992. Twenty-seven large American cities have no abortion provider.

The main organizations organizing Tuesday’s protests—Planned Parenthood, the Women’s March, the American Civil Liberties Union and NARAL-Pro-Choice America—are politically linked to the Democratic Party. But this party of US big business cannot be relied on or pressured to defend this basic right.

For decades, the Democrats have capitulated to the Republican right on abortion rights, eroding these rights to the point that for working class women in

much of the country, the right to an abortion has for practical purposes been destroyed. Abortions are not covered under Medicaid or Obamacare, meaning women in these programs must foot the bill. Working class women cannot fly to New York or Chicago or Los Angeles to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. Obama allowed restrictions on birth control coverage to be imposed by religious-based employers.

Nancy Pelosi tweeted this week against “this relentless and cruel Republican assault on women’s health.” But during the 2018 campaign she declared that defense of the right to an abortion was not a “litmus test” and insisted on backing Democrats in some congressional districts who held equally “cruel” views.

Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand and other presidential candidates also condemned the Alabama law. But none of them have made the defense of abortion rights, particularly in the South and in rural areas, a major feature of their campaigns. This is despite Trump’s repeated pledges to overturn *Roe v. Wade* .

The systematic evisceration of abortion rights across much of the country has attracted only a tiny fraction of the energy, money and media attention devoted to the Democrats’ reactionary #MeToo campaign, which seeks to improve the fortunes of upper-income women—actors, corporate executives, tenured professors—by removing their male superiors and peers through largely trumped-up allegations of sexual misconduct.

Now the incessant talk of “empowering” women—which means, of course, *bourgeois* women—runs into the embarrassing spectacle of Alabama’s first female governor, once hailed as a moderating influence on the Republican Party, signing into law the most restrictive anti-woman legislation in recent American history.

The attack on abortion rights is bound up with the colossal growth of social inequality, Washington’s war threats against Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, Russia and China and the militarization of society within the borders of the US, the campaign for internet censorship, Trump’s savage assault on immigrants and appeals to racist and fascist sentiments, and his drive to establish a personalist authoritarian regime. The Democrats have not opposed Trump’s pro-corporate policies and have

remained virtually silent on the police state attack on immigrants. Instead, they have based their opposition on a right-wing campaign for a more aggressive policy toward Russia and defense of the CIA and FBI.

The Democratic front-runner, Joe Biden, launched his presidential campaign over the weekend with an appeal for bipartisan unity with the Republicans, presenting himself as the “uniter” and avoiding any mention of social inequality or poverty.

The fight to defend abortion rights, and all democratic rights, requires a break with and struggle against the Democratic Party and the entire capitalist two-party setup. The drive toward dictatorship and medieval barbarism is an international phenomenon driven by the deepest crisis in the history of world capitalism.

The demand must be raised for free abortion and birth control services as part of a socialist health care system guaranteeing high quality medical care for every man, woman and child.

The fight for this demand and for the defense of democratic rights requires a struggle to put an end to capitalism and establish socialism. The only social force capable of carrying this out is the working class. Those determined to defend the right to abortion and democratic rights in general must link these issues with the fight against war and social inequality and turn to the mass of working people and youth. Defense of abortion rights must be linked to the mounting struggles of teachers and health care workers and the coming battles of auto workers.

Those who agree with this perspective should join the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality to build the revolutionary leadership to lead the mass struggles that lie ahead.



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