Reflections on the Women’s March from the APC/GSWS Community

An Inspiring Experience

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Going to the Women’s March in D.C. was an inspiring experience for me. Since the presidential election I have continued to wake up in the morning fearful for our country. While remaining deeply concerned, since going to the march I have more hope. The fact that so many people could come together to make their voices heard on the very first day of the Trump administration is testament to the potential for resistance and mobilization.

I was inspired because the crowds were so huge, bringing home forcefully the fact that those of us who feel anxious about the future are already engaged in resistance. I was moved by the people who had traveled great distances to come to D.C. While the march was huge (one security person thought there were 800,000 people, the march organizers think there were a million, the “official” count is over 500,000), I always felt in contact with one small group or another in my immediate surroundings- a kind of small-town feel. I spoke with millennials, older women, men, mothers with strollers, white, African-American, Latina, Asian-American- from states as far away as Arizona and Oregon. From the eastern U.S. people came on buses from dozens of towns and cities in Florida, Ohio, Massachusetts, Vermont. Toward the end of the day I had a wonderful conversation with two young women from Cincinnati. They were friends and had come to the march on an overnight bus, one with her four month-old, the other with her five month-old. Now they were ready to get back on the overnight bus to go home. They were very happy they had come.

I was moved by the energy of people at the march. There were chants (“Welcome to Your First Day, We Will Not Go Away,” “We Want a Leader, Not a Creepy Tweeter”) as people with their signs, their baby strollers, and their canes marched to the White
House after the speeches. Women chanted “My Body, My Choice,” men replied “Her Body, Her Choice.” There were signs everywhere. Some advocated action, some were satirical and funny, all were hard-hitting. Many were pro-women, pro-choice, pro-Planned Parenthood (“Vaginas brought you into this world and vaginas will vote you out.”) Many were anti-Trump (“No Country for Dirty Old Men,” “Melania, Blink Twice if You Need Help,” “Real Leaders Don’t Assault Women,” “This Pussy Grabs Back,” “Love Trumps Hate.”) An older woman’s sign read “I Can’t Believe I’m Still Protesting This Shit.” Some identified with a group they belong to- “Black Lives Matter,” “Arkansas Feminists,” “Presbyterians for Social Justice,” “United Steelworkers,” “Jews for Peace and Justice.”

The question of how diverse and representative the march would be was debated from its inception. The majority of marchers were women, many advocating for reproductive freedom and “women’s rights as human rights,” and the majority were white. However marchers, speakers and performers represented all ages, races and ethnicities. There were over 50 organizations listed as sponsors of the march, representing an enormous range not only of causes, but also a wide diversity of backgrounds: see womensmarch.com/partners. The four principle march organizers were Arab-American, African-American, Latina, and a white women. Linda Sarsour, one of the co-chairs and the Executive Director of the Arab American Association of New York, stated “What’s important is that racial justice, economic justice, climate justice, reproductive rights, LGBTQIA rights are all on the same plate.”

The question now is where does all this activist energy go from here? Does this type of political engagement remain at the level of protest or cohere into a potent political force, as speakers and marchers advocated? How can we create powerful resistance to destructive policies and at the same time build strong movements across our diversity?

Ten days later, there are encouraging signs that people will remain active and progressive movements will grow. There are increasing numbers of web and social media sites committed to helping people engage in ongoing action.

In Philadelphia, thousands protested the Republican retreat which was attended by Trump and there were many protestors at the Philadelphia airport this past Sunday. Since the election, people have been gathering at noon for “Tuesdays with Toomey” at PA US Senator Toomey’s downtown office, and respectfully but forcefully challenging the Trump Cabinet appointments and demanding to know Toomey’s position on climate change (he won’t say). These gatherings have grown to over 300 and similar protests have spread across the state of Pennsylvania. And it now appears that “Tuesday” protests are spreading to other states. For other sites about activist activities, google “Wall of Us,” “Daily Action,” “Run for Something,” “Swing Left,” “Indivisible Guide,” “The Scholars Strategy Network,” “Womensmarch.com/100.”

~ So let us hope- and act!