

For Left Forum, June 4, 2017 – MHI panel

## **A New Feminism Infuses the Resistance—and Must Battle Two Anti-Women Forces**

I'm going to address 3 issues: 1. What is new about the feminism in the anti-Trump Resistance? 2. What is new about today's official governmental misogyny? And 3. What is new about a segment of the left failing to support the new women's movements?

1. What is new with the anti-Trump feminists is first, that their demands have largely been total from the start. They refuse to separate off "their" issues such as reproductive rights from all rights under threat, from all aspects of justice as well as equality, from Black Lives Matter to the Muslim ban to deportations to free speech to science, education and truth. They appropriated the term "intersectionality" from African American feminists who reject the idea that they must choose between fighting for women's or Black liberation. The slogans we see at protests are great: "Women's place is in the revolution" and "The future is female"-- but they are at this point extremely abstract. Missing, at least publicly, is discussion of the specifics of what the movement is for, just what kind of world we would make after Trump falls. As we say in MHI, ideas derived from Marx's philosophy of liberation need to be theorized, to be realized as a force for revolution.

The second new today is that feminists are leaders in organizing and articulating anti-Trumpism on all fronts. They planned the Jan. 21 Women's Marches without waiting for him to become president, and have been in the lead of every part of the Resistance since. MHI wrote our current editorial within a week of the massive Women's Marches one day after the inauguration. Since then, women have continued to organize and lead the Resistance in every field, not only reproductive rights but all health care. Women were behind the defeat of the first Trump Care

bill, besieging their Congresspeople with opposition, and taking the lead in fights not only over education but science, not only in US issues but internationally.

The soft-on-Trump anti-neoliberals claim they are the anti-war left, but who other than women's groups are discussing the continuing death and destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention Syria? The left says "stop US imperialism" but the feminists work to do so by supporting grassroots women's organizations that fight for women's rights and survival, against imperialism and their own governments, such as MADRE's partners in Kenya and Latin America, Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, Revolutionary Associations of Women in Afghanistan.

To quote from our editorial:

The demonstrations opposed not just one facet of Trumpism; they opposed it in its totality. They were also a stinging repudiation of self-styled leftists who have been pro-Trump, soft-on-Trump, and "understanding of" Trumpism. Such people are moving in one direction; the masses of people on the cutting edge of this moment's singularly important freedom struggles have now moved in the opposite direction. . . . the emerging mass movement signaled clearly that we will not be talked down to. We signaled clearly that we do not intend to move "to the back of the bus," allowing our lives, freedoms, and dignity to be ignored in the interests of collaboration with (so-called populist) white nationalism.

And although the self-styled leftists who are soft on Trump have tried to sell us a set of false equivalences between Trump and *democratic* bourgeois politicians, the demonstrations signaled clearly that we are not buying any of it. It was precisely because we understand the [extraordinary dangers of Trump and Trumpism](#) that we took the unprecedented action of rising up spontaneously against *this* President, *this* government, on its very first day, in opposition not just to some specific policy or action, but to Trump and Trumpism themselves.

Objective threats and the elemental desire for freedom and dignity accomplished what decades of elitist liberal and left program-hatching, "raising consciousness," strategizing, and economic appeals have failed to do. The threats and the desire for freedom have created the start of a truly mass movement, spontaneously and suddenly."

By now, 4 months of Trumpism should have taught us 2 things: (1) Trump *will* do what he promised if he can; his campaign was not an act and he is not giving up his racism, sexism, anti-Muslim, anti-environment and anti-worker plans nor his favor-the wealthy and screw the poor policies; and (2) the main reason he has not accomplished more of those things already is the massive Resistance of ordinary Americans. IMO, the Resistance has inspired parts of the judiciary and administrative workers and Congress to stop or slow down Trump, at least in some areas, at least for now.

There is the new International Women's Strike group, which, I'm told, is "dominated by anti-capitalist feminists." On March 8, there was not only a general strike of women, there was also Resistencia Feminista NYC, a group of Latina immigrants who replicated a movement against gender violence active in Argentina, Spain, Mexico, Chile and Peru. La Resistencia Feminista NYC claim that more than 70,000 Peruvian women in more than 60 cities around the world are organizing and rising up in response to the lack of justice and the silence around physical, sexual and psychological violence. Also internationally, Eve Ensler's One Billion Rising actions have spread a feminist message to every corner of the world and literally involved millions of women.

2. Let me turn to what is new about today's official government misogyny. First, not even under Reagan has there ever been so much right-wing and big capital's political power in the President and Congress. They could pass whatever they want, were it not for the Resistance staying Congress' hand, both at mass protests and in Congressmen's own backyards at "town hall mtgs," which were instrumental in defeating the first "repeal and replace" healthcare bill. Apparently, few Congresspeople have any principles, so they just have to keep guessing whether

they can get re-elected by keeping their promises to the base that elected them, or by responding to their newly angry constituents.

Trump has already done much harm to women. Executive orders and Cabinet departmental changes have gutted equal pay regulations, funds for women's health care, foreign aid to women, including the expansion of the "gag rule" against even discussing abortion, and just Thurs., Trump changed a regulation to eliminate the requirement that employers' health insurance pay for contraceptives. All the rights we won slowly and with much difficulty over the past 50 years are being undone in a flash.

And be clear: all this doesn't come about only to please sexist constituents; much comes from the alignment of business interests with cuts in women's rights. Employers and insurance companies benefit financially directly, and employers benefit from fewer regulations protecting women. Millionaires reap the benefits of shifting the tax burden from them to the poor.

3. What is new about a segment of the left failing to support women's movements? In a broad sense, this is not new, inasmuch as the WLM that started in the late 1960s arose out of the left, during a period when the left largely consisted of vanguard parties who tried to control all movements toward revolution. Vanguard parties aimed to become the new rulers, so any grassroots movement without their line and agenda was a threat. But looking more closely, what is going on now is quite different from then.

Today, parties no longer dominate the so-called left, but the left has an equally vanguardist mentality in that they want to subsume other revolutionary forces and achieve power for themselves--although for different ends. The strain of reactionary leftists who oppose today's women's movements seem not to care about actual fundamental change in the society, for

women or workers. They are soft on Trump and emulate him, talking about economic determinism, claiming the fight for women's rights is diversionary, or "identity politics", or "bourgeois" or "just about Hillary." It certainly seems as if they want to out-Trump Trump in appealing to white men, in the hopes of getting into power themselves. In this scenario, there is no point in championing women, who have done better than men in improving their economic conditions over the past 45 years. Trump appealed to those men allegedly left behind while women and Black people advanced. For such men, women's rights are linked to the demise of white men's, largely mythical, better times.

Or so the story goes. As Andrew Kliman will discuss, this economic explanation for Trumpism is largely a myth as well. Racism and xenophobia dominate Trump supporters. And the threat of a left alliance with the alt-right is very real. Desperate times breed desperate "solutions."

Marxist-Humanist Initiative is completely opposed to such a view and strategy, and to any kind of Trumpism. We support mass movements for freedom from below. The self-organized, self-directed character of the new resistance movement suggests that it may be able to self-develop, in its own, independent direction, instead of allowing itself to be hemmed in, channeled, and throttled by politicians, liberals, or the so-called left.

This left dismisses the new movement as simply about electing Clinton. Well, the election is over. No one at the marches is saying that the only thing we can do is elect Democrats in the next election. On the other hand, there are certainly liberal and Democratic Party elements—pro-Clinton and pro-Sanders—within the new resistance. What is crucial is that the Democratic Party not be allowed to divert, coopt, or hem in the movement as it develops.

The exact same thing is true regarding the relationship between the resistance movement and the left. The resistance movement does not need to be directed by the left, or schooled by it, or “brought up to its level.” It is already far in advance of the self-styled leftists who are pro-Trump, soft-on-Trump, or “understanding of” Trumpism. The women’s movement has a clear recognition of who Mister Big is. It recognizes that our life-or-death task now is to resist and eliminate a distinct, much worse, and more threatening enemy than is an ordinary bourgeois political party—we must defeat and eliminate authoritarian, misogynistic, white nationalist (so-called populist), xenophobic, racist Trumpism.