

United States - The Republican Attack On Women

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Since the achievements of the radicalization of the “Sixties,” the capitalist ruling class, as expressed by the two capitalist parties, has steadily rolled back those gains.

Now the sharp right turn of the Republican Party begun under the Trump presidency made it the spearhead of this reactionary drive.

One front is the rights and policies won by women. Foremost has been the drive to limit and suppress the right to abortion, which was codified into law by the Supreme Court in 1973, in a ruling known as *Roe vs. Wade*.

Understanding how *Roe* was won is important today in the fight against the Republican assault against it.

Today, that decision is portrayed as something handed down from above by the Supreme Court.

The nine robed reactionaries on the Supreme Court (all men) didn't suddenly see the light. They were forced to legalize abortion by a mass women's liberation movement that called for “Free Abortion On Demand” as well as other demands.

In the “Sixties”, a new phase in the fight for women's rights was signaled by a book by Betty Friedan in 1963 titled *The Feminine Mystique*, which challenged the prevailing role of women as confined to the domestic domain and child rearing, denying that they should have equal pay for the same work as men, and belittling equal education opportunities.

Even in high school, women were steered into classes called “home economics”.

From the mass response by women (at first mainly white women) to the book, a new organization, led by Betty Friedan, emerged in 1966, The National Organization for Women (NOW), which still exists today as the largest women's rights organization.

The fight for women's rights became part of the radicalization of the “Sixties” in the U.S.

There two main forces behind the “Sixties”. One was the new Black liberation struggle. The other was the youth radicalization.

The mass youth radicalization around the world of the “Sixties” began with opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam.

While the antiwar movement began in the United States with the first student-led mass actions, in the U.S. the youth radicalization was tied into the new civil rights movement that began earlier, in 1956. This made the youth radicalization in the U.S. unique.

Black youth in the Jim Crow South were prominent in the mass demonstrations beginning in 1956, with the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott against segregated sitting on buses, with Blacks forced into “the back of the bus”.

This led to the Supreme Court overturning local busing regulations.

Out of this came the formation of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960 that became the cutting edge of the movement and developed into a leading part of the Black Power Movement in 1966, and was greatly influenced by Malcom X.

From the beginning, white youth the in North and South became active in this struggle. The social weight of the Black struggle was always part of the youth radicalization and of the antiwar movement in the U.S.

Out of the student-based youth radicalization in the late 1960s a new women’s liberation movement emerged, to the left of NOW.

Young women radicals were motivated in part in revolt against male domination in some of the radicalized youth organizations, including Students for a Democratic Society.

As a result there were positive changes in the youth organizations, including socialist ones, as women’s liberation became part of the movement.

The new youth women’s liberation movement helped radicalize the broader women’s movement, including NOW.

The fight for abortion rights became a central part of the mass women’s movement and demonstrations.

In 1971, this led to the repeal of the law against abortion in New York (all states had some such laws). The governor of N.Y., Nelson Rockefeller, scion of the Rockefeller oil and banking oligarchs, signed the repeal, and publicly stated it was because of the pressure of the women’s movement.

Threatened by the mass movement for abortion rights, in the context of the mass antiwar movement (the majority of Americans were against the war by then) as well as the Black uprisings in the cities North and South, and new organizations of other people of color against racism, the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe vs Wade* that state laws against abortion were unconstitutional.

That’s how abortion rights became legal. The Court’s decision was not based on women’s rights to control their own bodies, but on the “right to privacy”, shaky reasoning.

The right of women to control their own bodies was the movement’s basic position (popularized in the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective handbook, *Our Bodies Our Selves*), and that is still true today in the fight against Republican attacks on abortion rights.

This included the right of women to control their own sexuality in a patriarchic society that sought to control women at every level.

In recent decades, states have increasingly passed laws with the support of members of both parties imposing restrictions on abortion rights. When challenged the courts have mostly upheld them, claimed they didn’t infringe on *Roe vs Wade*. But these restrictions have made abortion increasingly difficult to obtain in many states.

Congress also passed a law with bipartisan support, known as the Hyde Amendment, that banned the use of federal funds for abortions, that went into effect in 1980, and still stands. Specifically, it denies Medicaid funding for abortions for low income women.

This and other state laws especially hit hard on poorer women, including Black and other women of color. In some states, women in their teens have to get their parents' permission which is not always easy or possible for young women who don't want their parents to know they have gotten pregnant, or their parents who oppose abortion rights.

Such restrictions have been more severe in states with Republican controlled legislatures.

With the election of Trump in 2016 Republicans now control 26 states. With three new Supreme Court justices appointed by Trump and confirmed by then Republican controlled Senate, there are six out of the nine justices on the Court who are pledged to overturn the right to abortion.

The six are referred to in the mainstream media as "conservative" but they are all reactionaries.

Biden and the establishment Democrats still claim that the Supreme Court has "integrity" and is not a partisan body, when nearly everybody knows that's not true.

Republican voters (who comprised nearly half of voters in the 2020 elections) know that the Court is "in their pocket". Most Democratic voters know that is true too.

With the Republican Party now taken over by Trump, they know they have a reliable ally in the Court.

On the right to abortion, Republican controlled legislatures are now in the vanguard of passing laws against *Roe*.

Just one example has been the Texas law.

That law prohibits abortion after six weeks of conception, when many women do not even know they are pregnant. This is a clear violation of *Roe*.

The reactionary controlled present Court upheld this law in a secret session without discussion. (That the Court can do this is another example of its undemocratic character.)

The "reasoning" of the six was a peculiar aspect of the law, that didn't leave it up to the Texas state government to enforce it, but instead empowered any citizen of any state to sue any woman in Texas who gets an abortion after six weeks and her doctor, and anyone else who "abets" the abortion including driving the woman to the doctor etc. for at least \$10,000.

The result has been to effectively overturn *Roe* in Texas, and to allow any Republican controlled state to do the same on this or other pretext.

Another law in Mississippi prohibits abortion after 15 weeks, also an open violation of *Roe*, but without the peculiarity of the Texas one. Challenges to that law has put the constitutionality of *Roe* directly before the Court, which will rule on it in the fall.

In preparation for a possible overturning of *Roe* the 26 Republican controlled states have already prepared laws outlawing abortion.

Even if the Court doges the constitutionality of *Roe* to pretend it has "integrity", the rulings it has

already made mean that those 26 states have been given the green light to in fact outlaw abortion rights.

The states will be divided 26 to 24 over the issue in either case.

Republicans are extending their attacks to the rights of LGBTI people. As with the case of abortion rights, it is necessary to see how those rights — which which as in the case with the oppression of women, only partial to their liberation — were won.

In part inspired by the women's movements' fight for control of their own sexuality a new movement in the fight for gay and lesbian rights emerged in 1969.

The spark was a police raid on a bar that was a gathering place for gay men and lesbians, in New York City's Greenwich Village. With homosexuality against the law, cops would routinely raid gay and lesbian known gathering spots to beat up people for sport.

But this time those in the bar fought back in force against the cops, who were surprised, and beat them back. This victory rapidly mushroomed into a nationwide gay and lesbian rights movement, that over time grew to be a movement for other gender nonconforming people — the LGBTI movement.

That led to broader recognition that the fight against the cops in the bar included trans women, which of course was known by those who fought back at the time.

The new Republican attack is centered on a campaign to remove books on sexuality and even the existence of LGBTI people from libraries — part of a broader Republican attack on removing books about the fight for Black liberation, including on the systematic institutional racism that Black Lives Matter revealed, etc.

In just one example, in Texas, Attorney General Ken Paxton is accusing the Austin Independent School District of breaking a new Republican state law for celebrating LGBTQI pride week. In a letter, Paxton argued the district's eighth annual pride events were considered sex education that require consent from parents, another attack on discussing sexuality in public.

Several district administrators have reported death threats and had their personal information posted online.

In related news, the superintendent of Texas's Granbury Independent School District has demanded a group of librarians remove books on sexuality and gender identity. An investigation by NBC News, ProPublica and The Texas Tribune revealed leaked audio of Jeremy Glenn's meeting with district librarians in early January.

Glen said, "I'm not saying that we're going to be pulling all our books out or burning books or anything like that. Absolutely not. I think there is an absolute place probably for every book. It just may not be in a public school library. We're not going to have 14-year-old girls pick up a book in our high school about sex. It ain't gonna happen."

The Republican new line of attack on sexual freedom has been raised by Supreme Court Justice Amy Barrett. She has raised she would be open to state's challenging laws permitting contraception, and some Republicans in state legislatures are considering it. This would challenge rights going back to way before the "Sixties".

The fight for the right to contraception began in the 1920s.

The background of the fight for abortion rights and these related issues posts the way forward against the Republican assault today.

That is mass action.

With no radicalization like in the “Sixties”, and a retreat of most struggles since 2020, this is an uphill battle. The retreat has been marked by reliance on the Democratic Party, whose establishment has marginalized its “progressive” wing, and is moving rapidly to the right.

But this is a necessary battle, even if now a small minority position.

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