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USA

Clinic Defense and Abolition

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On Saturday 20 June, at Manhattan's Planned Parenthood clinic in Soho, New York City for Abortion Rights organized a clinic defense against aggressive groups of far-right anti-abortion evangelicals. These well-funded and organized groups, which included At the Well Ministries, Love Life, and Operation Save America (a rebrand of the notorious Operation Rescue of the 1990s) have mobilized across the country, making New York City their next target for enforcing their hateful, reactionary agenda: forced birth, forced gestation, Islamophobic and anti-LGBTQ persecution. Operation Save America was previously headed by Flip Benham, who remains strongly associated with them, and seemed to be the headliner of this action. A misogynist and bigot, Benham has made a career of stalking abortion doctors, destroying Qurans in public, following teenage trans girls into bathrooms, and, as has recently come to light, paying off Norma McCorvey (the "Jane Roe" of Roe V. Wade") to publically convert to Christianity and "repent" her abortion. His sons, the "Benham Brothers", who were not at the action, are closely involved with Love Life, an extremely well-funded non-profit organization dedicated to stripping bodily autonomy from all those who can become pregnant. Calling their action "#JesusMatters", the antis appropriated the language of the Black Lives Matter movement, denouncing abortion as a racist campaign of black genocide and comparing their actions to the nationwide protests against racist police brutality.

At 7:00 AM, the antis, none of whom were wearing masks, attempted to rush the clinic; when they were forced back, they attempted to block the doors and forcibly remove the barricades around the clinic, meanwhile hurling racist abuse at East Asian and South Asian comrades. Planned Parenthood, against NYCFAR's wishes, called the police to remove them. Predictably, this maneuver only demonstrated what we have known all along, that the cops, as enforcers of the capitalist state which depends on gestational labor to sustain itself, have no interest in defending women or marginalized people. Though the antis' actions were in violation of the FACE Act, a federal law prohibiting the obstruction of healthcare facilities or the use of intimidation, threats, or force against those seeking reproductive health services, the police made Planned Parenthood remove their own barricades and left the antis alone, retreating to their van across the street for the entirety of the action, as the antis continued to physically push clinic defenders and Planned Parenthood staff and intimidate patients trying to enter the building.

This particular clinic is no stranger to anti-choice demonstrations. A contingent from Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, a nearby Catholic Church, marches there regularly, and Love Life has staged protests there before. These past demonstrations, which can turn out hundreds of protestors, including trained "sidewalk counselors" to manipulate patients to try to keep them from following through with their abortions, they have for the most part refrained from trying to physically obstruct the clinic.

In this context the clinic defenders have historically had a somewhat tense relationship with Planned Parenthood, some of whose staff feel that the actions of the defenders are needlessly disruptive, politicizing a terrain which is and should remain apolitical. But abortion clinics are an inherently political terrain, as reproductive justice is an inherently political issue, something which the antis have always recognized, and are continuing to mobilize around. A Planned Parenthood worker said, "I've been doing this for thirty years, and this feels like we're back in the 90s. I thought things were getting better." The antis' own rhetoric reinforced this: "We're not the kumbaya Christians, we're warriors of Christ," and openly expressing their goal to keep patients from entering the clinic while making racist and homophobic remarks to clinic defenders and Planned Parenthood escorts.

Learning that the antis planned to demonstrate outside of the clinic on Saturday, June 20, New York City for Abortion

Rights planned a counter-demonstration. After antis showed up at Planned Parenthood on Friday, June 19 with aggressive tactics that threatened patient access to the clinic, Planned Parenthood encouraged NYCFAR to bring as many people as possible on Saturday to engage and distract the antis enough to allow patients to enter, a strategy that was ultimately successful.

There are several lessons to be drawn from Saturday's events, and many complex and thorny dynamics at work. The antis involved in yesterday's demonstration were mostly Black, though Flip Benham and many of these organizations' leaders are white, while the clinic defenders were mostly white, and much of the antis' rhetoric focused on the vile racism of Planned Parenthood's founder, Margaret Sanger. While we recognize that Planned Parenthood is an important ally doing valuable clinical work, we also condemn Sanger's advocacy for racist eugenics.

The racial disparity evident at Saturday's demonstration is not something that can be ignored or dismissed, but neither can we accept a superficial identitarian critique that ignores the actual material conditions behind the racial dynamics of the current anti-choice movement. As Marxist feminists, we recognize that both eugenicists and forced birthers are working towards the same goal, control by state and capital over gestational labor for its own ends, to both reduce "undesirables" and quash insurrections, as well as to swell the workforce and the military.

Instead of addressing the structural poverty which compels many Black women who might otherwise choose to have a child to obtain abortions, the anti-abortion movement is instead concerned with stripping bodily autonomy under the facade of "protecting lives in the womb," condemning Black women to continue to perform reproductive labor in dangerous conditions with little to no material support. It is no accident that evangelical ministries have poured money and resources into organizing in Black and immigrant communities, cynically appropriating the rhetoric of Black liberation and racial justice for its own ends, and erasing the Black radical feminists who have continually fought for the rights of Black women to control their bodies, against the efforts of those who seek to both force and deny parenthood to them. For instance, in 1994, a group of Black women in Chicago, recognizing that there was no space in the current women's rights movement for women of color, marginalized women, and trans people, formed Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice, and pioneered the Reproductive Justice movement and published a full-page statement in the Washington Post and Roll Call. Three years later, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective was established to fight for reproductive justice, defined as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities."

It is also glaringly obvious, especially during the recent movement to defund and abolish the police, to abolish the carceral state altogether, that we cannot turn to laws or the police to protect ourselves or grant us liberation. *Roe V. Wade* was not a benevolent recognition of "a woman's right to choose," but an attempt to suppress militant left-wing feminist organizing and re-route this power into a liberal framework of "privacy" and "rights of the individual." The Democratic establishment, positioning abortion as an individual right to privacy while continuing to actively quash any working-class organizing to materially improve the lives of all people who can become pregnant, and demanding that we work within the confines of regressive laws and the carceral system to defend our rights, are not our allies. On Saturday, we saw tangible evidence of this. The NYPD must be stripped of funding, and those funds be redirected not only to providing free abortions, but also to other essential aspects of reproductive justice: free healthcare, free housing, free childcare, free education. Free abortion on demand, as well as the right to give birth and raise a child in safe, healthy, supportive, and dignified conditions.

We cannot turn to the law, the police, the ostensibly "pro-choice" Democrats, or the non-profit complex to ensure these rights, but must militantly seize them for ourselves, on the streets, and in front of the clinic. The antis have made it very clear that they have no regard for "civility," "legality," or "safe, legal, and rare." Neither should we.

June 25, 2020

Source [Spectre](#).

PS:

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