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USA :

Solidarity with Texas women

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In cities around the country, abortion rights activists took part in a National Day of Action to Defend Abortion Rights on July 15, called to protest the draconian anti-abortion bill passed in Texas the week before.

Passage of the bill came after five weeks of angry protests inside and outside the Texas state Capitol building—including a "people's filibuster," in which hundreds of pro-choice demonstrators shouted down legislators' attempts to pass the bill. In the end, legislators approved the bill, which outlaws abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy and places such strict restrictions on abortion providers that it will result in the closure of all but five abortion clinics out of the existing 42.

But for abortion rights activists, this is part of a larger fight. Pro-choice activists called the day of action not just to draw attention to the attack on women's reproductive rights in Texas, but to link the fight to the ongoing assault in states across the country.

Hundreds gathered at the state Capitol in Austin, after marching through downtown, many of them singing Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It," a song that has become a sort of rallying cry for local activists. Speakers included author and liberal radio host Jim Hightower.

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ACTIONS WERE also planned in about 20 cities on July 15. Here are reports from activists in a few of those cities.

â€” In Oklahoma City, some 75 activists braved the rainy weather to attend a rally at the State Capitol. Poet Lauren Zuniga kicked off the rally by reciting her poems "To the Oklahoma Lawmakers" and "Personhood."

Martha Skeeters of the Oklahoma Coalition for Reproductive Justice and Teri McGrath from Lawton/Fort Sill Progressives rounded out the speakers. A few members of the audience then spoke about their experiences in being activists on women's issues and how important it is especially in such a conservative state.

â€” In Washington, D.C., abortion rights supporters joined anti-racist protesters gathered to protest the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who shot Black teenager Trayvon Martin. When a few dozen women's rights activists arrived at the White House for the 8 p.m. event, about 40 people were already there after taking part in a march from Malcolm X Park in Northwest D.C.

Some pro-choice protesters just joined in, and, after some discussion, all the pro-choice demonstrators joined in chanting for Trayvon and against the verdict. The growing picket alternated chants that encompassed both issues, like "Gay, straight, Black, white. All unite for human rights!" and "Pro-life that's a lie. You don't care if Trayvon dies."

Eventually, the group switched seamlessly to several chants in solidarity with the assault on abortion rights in Texas. Feminist activist Alli McCracken said, "This is a really exciting rally that ended up being a mutual fight against oppression in the forms of racism and sexism."

About a half hour later, a loud contingent of more than 200 demonstrators organized by Howard University students

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against Zimmerman's acquittal arrived from Farragut North and the growing demo switched back to anti-racist chants.

At the end, National Organization for Women President Terry O'Neill spoke. "We cannot end sexism without also ending racism," she said. "Racism, sexism, homophobia—all oppressions are linked."

In Madison, Wis., more than 50 activists came together to stand in solidarity with Texas women. The loud and angry protest started out a few blocks from the Capitol building at a major intersection.

Republican Gov. Scott Walker recently signed a bill into law requiring transvaginal ultrasounds for women seeking abortions. This bill also requires physicians at abortion clinics to have admitting privileges at hospitals—a transparent move to create financial and bureaucratic barriers to the functioning of these clinics.

From its initial location, the crowd occupied State Street for a short march to the Capitol, where there was a speak-out featuring members of the International Socialist Organization, Jobs Not Vaginas and the National Organization for Women. A solidarity statement was read by Planned Parenthood, whose members and staff were in court fighting Walker's new law.

In Denton, Texas, about 40 people attended a rally organized by the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance, the Radical Alliance for Gender Equality and the International Socialist Organization.

A diverse crowd attended the event, including women from the pre-Roe v. Wade era alongside younger women. Beginning with an open-mic session, many of the speakers held a megaphone for the first time during the event. They shared personal stories and their outrage at how the anti-abortion bill would affect the women of Texas, many of them connecting the ways that the bill primarily affects poor and working-class women.

The experiences of women of color who have been forcibly sterilized was also addressed by speakers, as well as why abortion providers are important to the LGBTQ community.

Seen as only a small step in the long battle to stop the effects of the bill from becoming a reality, the rally showed that women and allies of Denton, Texas are ready and eager to finish the war against abortion rights and turn it into a movement that works toward women's equality.

In Providence, R.I., more than 40 women and men marched from Burnside Park in downtown Providence to the Rhode Island statehouse, showing solidarity with women in Texas and protesting attacks on reproductive rights in that state and across the country.

At the statehouse, women spoke out against attacks on abortion rights both nationally and in Rhode Island, where the state legislature recently voted to fund so-called crisis pregnancy centers—non-medical facilities staffed by anti-abortion activists who pose as medical experts in order to shame and intimidate women seeking reproductive health care.

While this bill was vetoed at the last minute by Rhode Island Gov. Lincoln Chafee, the proliferation of these fake clinics—which by now outnumber actual abortion clinics in the state by three to one—dramatically compounds the problem of lack of access to reproductive health care, especially for low-income women and women of color.

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The demonstration ended with a call for full reproductive health care for all womenâ€”meaning fully funded and fully accessibleâ€”and for true universal health care for all. "This doesn't end with abortion and reproductive health care," said organizer Lindsay Goss. "This about full comprehensive health care for every single person."

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