

New Orleans abortion rights protest blocks busy Bourbon St.

written by Gregory E. Williams
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SLL photos: Gregory E. Williams

New Orleans, Sept. 10 — Today the Louisiana Abortion Rights Action Committee

held a demonstration and march downtown. Signs and hand-outs read, “Raise the wages, lower the rent, abortion access now,” highlighting the intersection of all these issues affecting poor and working people. Abortion access is a working-class issue.

The action was endorsed by Workers Voice Socialist Movement, Socialist Unity Party, Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha, and Louisiana Workers Councils.

Speakers began with addresses outside the Louisiana Supreme Court building on Royal Street.

Gavrielle Gemma of the WVSM said that “there is a right-wing movement that wants to protect the accumulation of vast wealth and income inequality. They see [this moment] as an opportunity to take away everything—from workers, from women, from everybody, just so they can make profits.

“Every movement has a beginning and a time when it seems as if it is not strong. But the people are strong. Vote for whoever you want; it won’t change the situation. Organize. People fighting back will change the situation.”

After the talks, the crowd began marching through the French Quarter, chanting, “Not the church, not the state, rich men won’t decide our fate” and “Abortion is health care.” Only a couple of onlookers were openly hostile. Overwhelmingly, the service industry workers and even some tourists seemed receptive. Servers and kitchen staff came out of the restaurants, took fliers, and pumped their fists.

For around 10 minutes, the marchers blocked one of the most commercially important intersections on Bourbon Street. Workers from the nearby queer bars came down to see what was going on, and some joined in the chants.

Over a megaphone, one organizer said: “If you’re wondering why we’re stopping traffic, the reason is that our lives—our right to exist with bodily autonomy, free

from oppression, free from violence—is under attack! And whether you’re out there working or drinking, you are involved! Join us! Take a flier!”

Service workers’ power

In 2019, visitors to New Orleans spent \$10.05 billion, making tourism and the service sector that it relies on a driver of the city’s economy. The French Quarter is the heart of that. This means that the workers here have tremendous power. Women make up 57% of New Orleans’ low-paid hospitality workforce. If workers—especially women and gender-oppressed people—collectively decide to shut the city down, we can stop the flow of cash to the bosses and force them to meet our demands.

The smallest direct action — like blocking Bourbon Street for a few minutes — contains within it the seeds of bigger collective action. On Saturday, the workers in the bars and restaurants heard the message and pumped their fists. One day, what if they all walk out?

There should be no doubt that the specter of the George Floyd Summer is fresh on the minds of the ruling class and all their lackeys in the state.

And that radical moment contained within itself yet more seeds and echoes of the urban rebellions that shook this country after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination. It was the rebellions of the people that consolidated the gains of the Civil Rights era.

Or take contemporary India. That country is very different from the U.S. But it’s still worth thinking about the fact that, for several years in a row, Indian workers (including farm laborers) have carried out possibly the biggest general strikes in history—even for a day.

By shutting down whole sectors of the economy, the farmers defeated fascist Modi’s anti-farmer legislation. We have much to learn from the working class of India.

For now, the workers of New Orleans and the U.S. are a sleeping giant. But if we get organized, we can have the power. That's what the ruling class and their fascist movement fear.

Abortion is health care. And if we don't get it, shut it down!

