

DEFEND WOMEN'S RIGHT TO ABORTION **BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY**

In some cities in California today, people will be marching behind the banner, “*today we march, tomorrow we run.*” This is ridiculous and insulting. We will never run. We are not cowards. We march today and we keep marching; we fight by any means necessary to defend abortion rights. If the slogan of the march is supposed to be a call on our movement to use the ballot box to maintain abortion rights, then the slogan of this march would be, *today we march, tomorrow we vote.* But even that would be wrong.

Time is of the essence, but we have the power to win this fight. We cannot win the preservation of abortion rights through lobbying or relying on politicians, electoral politics, prayer, or argument. Doing this would mean we are prepared to sacrifice abortion rights now, just to elect Democrats in the mid-term elections. Since *Roe v Wade* was decided in 1973, Congress has had ample opportunities to enact national pro-abortion laws. Instead, they have bowed too many times to states’ rights fanatics, leading to the continuous erosion of abortion rights. We can’t have leaders of our movement portray women as people who would run from a fight. It’s not true. This movement would never run from a fight.

The Texas anti-abortion law, Senate Bill 8, must and can be defeated. The aim of SB 8 is to get multiple lawsuits filed against abortion clinics, to starve them out and force them to close down. The right wing’s self-named “vigilante justice” will not restrict its tactics to reliance on the law. This law is fascist in nature by giving all men the right to deny the rights of every woman. The only way to defeat this law is for a new women’s movement – linked to other civil rights movements, fighting by any means necessary – to give all woman the ability to retain control over their bodies and to defeat Trump’s misogynist policies.

How to build real power and win victory

Thankfully, we have a model that can show us how to win. In the summer of 1992, an organization of far-right wing fanatics, Operation Rescue (OR), announced that they would be making a national tour. They wanted to show that they could shut down all the abortion clinics

Defend *Roe v. Wade* and defeat the Texas anti-abortion law **now**

Build mass mobilizations as the road to victory – **the real power is in the streets**

in various cities in the nation. They met their match in the determined leadership of the National Women’s Rights Organizing Coalition (NWROC), an integrated organization of young women and men who defended abortion rights by any means necessary – *and won.*

In 1991, Operation Rescue had shut down all the abortion clinics in Wichita, Kansas. They received a tremendous amount of publicity for the siege they conducted in front of the abortion clinics, preventing staff and patients from gaining entry. The press exaggerated the number of OR people who descended on Wichita – 2,500 people was sometimes reported as 25,000 people. Coming out of their success in Wichita, in the spring of 1992, OR announced their intention to shut down abortion clinics all over the United States. OR wanted to pressure the Supreme Court to overturn abortion rights in the upcoming abortion case, *Casey v Planned Parenthood.* OR leader Randall Terry believed he could actually mobilize 25,000 people to shut down abortion clinics in other cities.

The first city that OR descended on was Buffalo, NY. That’s where they learned they weren’t in Kansas anymore. The National Women’s Rights Organizing Coalition (NWROC), which is the predecessor organization of the Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration, and Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary (BAMN), showed up in Buffalo with about 100 people. NWROC was determined to keep Buffalo’s abortion clinics open. Members of NOW, NARAL, other women’s groups also sent “observers” and a few rank-and-file members to Buffalo.

From the first day that OR occupied all of the space that existed in front of one of Buffalo’s best known abortion clinics, NWROC learned through experience what

tactics are needed to keep abortion clinics open. Whenever NWROC learned which abortion clinic was the main target, they gathered their forces and made human barricades at the entrance. NWROC members had learned in action that defeating OR required women to put their bodies on the line to defend a precious right that they had to maintain. In contrast, all of the other organizations that came to Buffalo told their members that they should not be involved in any violent confrontations with OR and instead to show up at the clinics to “observe” OR’s activities for potential lawsuits and to publicize what OR was doing.

When the first carload of OR members arrived at the clinic, they saw the NWROC members keeping the clinic open, so they promptly marched toward the NWROC members and began kicking, punching, shoving, using any means necessary to clear NWROC from the front. NWROC members held their ground, and once the press arrived, OR retreated. They had lost their first battle in Buffalo. Members of women’s rights organizations that had always condemned mass self-defense tactics saw on the first day of battle what it takes to keep clinics open. Many of those members joined NWROC in action for the remainder of OR’s thoroughly unsuccessful attack in Buffalo.

Trying another tactic, when OR lined up their members in front of NWROC members, in an effort to make both organizations a barricade to patients who were arriving at the clinic, the patients who came were prepared to be lifted up and carried over the OR phalanx to get inside the clinic. *Every young woman who was scheduled for an abortion that day was able to receive one.* The majority of people who were patients at the clinic were young black women who did not expect that they

would have to place themselves in the middle of a rugby-style scrum. However, when they arrived at the clinic they were inspired by the pro-abortion forces and committed themselves to undertake the defense of abortion rights by any means necessary.

OR had not been able to turn out large numbers of people in Buffalo. They used their defeat in Buffalo to rally thousands of their members to Baton Rouge, Louisiana a few months later in order to shut down the one abortion clinic that existed in and around Baton Rouge. Again, NWROC and other women who quickly became soldiers in defense of abortion rights also went to Baton Rouge. To close the clinics, after days of unsuccessful actions, OR decided to hold a prayer session and then march to the entryway of the clinic. NWROC and the pro-abortion side had somewhere between 100-200 mostly women tasked with defending the clinic. NWROC leaders organized women to form a few rows standing together, arms locked, determined to hold their ground. The leadership of OR mistakenly believed that when the pro-abortion women saw thousands of people marching toward the entryway, they would retreat.

When NWROC and other women refused to budge, the leaders of OR knocked down or threw to the side of the road the NWROC members and other women who were in front. But OR failed to clear the way for their procession to hold its victory march to the clinic door. NWROC's leaders demanded that the women stand back up, form their lines, and lock their arms. Because the people who made it through the NWROC barricades were the leaders of OR, the people who were then confronting the newly formed phalanx of women were the rank-and-file OR members. To them, the women seemed like mythical warriors, undaunted by the OR assault. Cut off from their leaders, rank-and-file members of OR were not prepared to plough down the women. And so, despite OR's huge numeric advantage, under NWROC's leadership, the women won the day.

By the end of the summer of 1992, OR disintegrated. The only big action of the organization was an attempt to hold a mass protest at the Republican Party convention in Houston that fall to try to get the party to adopt their anti-abortion stance. OR failed.

OR was strong in the summer of 1992 because it had a purpose. Its aim was to pressure newly-seated Supreme Court Justice Souter, who was at that time the decisive vote on the Supreme Court, to strike down *Roe v Wade* by voting with the

anti-abortion wing of the Court. OR wanted Souter to uphold the statute in a pivotal anti-abortion case called *Casey v Planned Parenthood*. OR knew they had to make the anti-abortion forces in the US look like the majority to garner Souter's vote as well as to get a change in the platform of the Republican Party. NWROC shared the view that mass actions and militant confrontations, in which the pro-abortion forces prevailed, coupled with mass demonstrations, could force Souter to uphold *Roe*. NWROC was right.

In this same period of the spring of 1992, Los Angeles erupted into riots led by black and Latino youth that cost the city billions of dollars. While it is impossible to say exactly why Justice Souter voted the way he did, it is fair to assume he could envision other riots erupting if *Roe v Wade* was struck down. A riot that had leaders who had learned from their experiences in the movement to save *Roe v Wade* could create a dual power confrontation, having those who supported the status quo on one side, and the poor and oppressed on the other. Such leadership could transform a riot into a contest for political power.

When Souter voted to strike down *Casey*, thus upholding *Roe*, he may have been consciously seeking to maintain the status quo as pertains to abortion rights, but also the status quo that left the powers that be in charge.

Defending women's right to abortion against the Trump movement

The most important lesson learned by the actions of NWROC was that if we are prepared to fight by any means necessary, we have the power to beat the far right-wing misogynists in the streets and in the courts. Unlike 1992, the Supreme Court today has a majority of hardened anti-abortion judges and, as we saw on Jan. 6, 2021, the pro-Trump fanatics are prepared to challenge for power.

Many Trump supporters are people who had been in OR. Another difference between 1992 and now: many Trump supporters who are prepared to contest for power have a full political agenda, including driving out immigrants and minorities, subordinating all women to the whim of every man, and creating an authoritarian government with Donald Trump in charge.

We know that a majority of white voters elected Donald Trump president in 2016. Trump's racist, misogynist, crazed cult followers are perfectly willing to do anything they can to place Donald Trump back in power, even if that means giving up their Constitutional rights and accepting fascist rule. On our side, we know that

we speak for the majority of all Americans in defending abortion rights. We know that our majority is prepared to defend women's rights, as part of the fight for an equal, all-inclusive United States. Our side has experienced building mass actions large enough to shut down a whole city. We saw the power of the women's rights movement when we shut down Washington, DC in 2017 the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated president. If the women who marched in 2017 turn out in Washington now and are prepared to demonstrate to the current administration how determined we are to defend abortion rights, we could get President Biden to place more justices on the Supreme Court so that we could win at the Supreme Court again.

BAMN is proud to be an organization founded by leaders of NWROC. We are determined to fight for civil rights, immigrant rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and for all the poor and oppressed in and outside of the United States.

In 1967, when he was assassinated, Dr. Martin Luther King was in the process of organizing a poor people's mass march on Washington that would stay in Washington until the federal government passed new legislation to address and advance their needs. Dr. King is the most famous by-any-means-necessary leader in American history. BAMN is continually learning from his example.

We march today in cities across the United States. We must fight to make our national mobilization into a single demonstration in Washington, DC. Between now and when the Supreme Court rules on the Texas abortion law, there will be attacks in front of abortion clinics and the people in those clinics. We must be ready to defend the clinics, their staff, and the women from the attacks of pro-Trump fanatics.

BAMN is not the only organization that has learned what it takes to win from the summer of 1992. The far-right veterans of OR are a part of the Trump movement, and many of them have drawn the same lessons as BAMN. But now, they believe they can organize thousands of people to attack abortion rights by any means necessary. We have a responsibility to prove them wrong.

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