

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6721>



Fourth International and women's liberation

The new rise of the women's movement

- Fourth International resolutions - International Committee - IC 2020 -

Publication date: Thursday 30 July 2020

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights
reserved

The new rise of women's and feminist mobilizations in recent years is an inescapable fact. In July 2019 the women's commission of the Fourth International, through an international seminar, started the process of writing a resolution to propose to the March 2020 meeting of our International Committee to outline our positive appreciation of this upsurge.

The Covid-19 pandemic prevented the holding of our meeting. Nevertheless we think it is useful to publish the resolution as it was at the end of 2019, knowing that a new version at our meeting in early 2021 will take into account the state of the mobilization we have seen since then and in particular the way that the Cov-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of women's work in both the public and private sphere.

*"In order to change the conditions of life we must learn to see them through the eyes of women." Leon Trotsky, "Against Bureaucracy, Progressive and Unprogressive", in **Problems of Everyday Life**, Monad Press, New York, 1979, p. 65.*

Introduction

In recent years we have noted a new rise of feminist movements that in a number of countries have taken on a mass character, and in parallel, an increased participation and leadership of women in mass broad protest movements and popular uprisings. From this point of view, we consider, given the different paradigms of struggle from that of the late 19th and early 20th century and the 1960s and 1970s, and their development at the same time as other processes of massive international mobilizations, that we are seeing a new wave of the women's movement that will have a lasting effect on the forms and demands of the class struggle.

1. The context

Our 17th World Congress text underlined the general geopolitical chaos and crisis existing today. This crisis particularly affects women and is engendering a generalized backlash against what is often called the "longest revolution", which led to the increase of women's rights during the last century.

The contradiction between (young) women's aspirations to a worthwhile life on the one hand and the worsening of their actual situation on the other underlies the new rise of women's mobilizations and explains the comprehensive nature of the platforms that have often emerged and the development of the feminist women's strike as a method of action symbolizing a rejection of the system as a whole.

1.1 Neoliberalism

Capitalist globalization, financialization, and the increasing internationalization of production lines have reduced the capacity of governments to implement economic policies in the collective interests of the ruling classes. Imperialist countries still try to ensure favourable conditions for capital accumulation, but global capital operates more independently than before. The financial crises of 1997-1997 and 2007-2008 revealed the contradictions inherent in capitalist globalization with major consequences: political, social and structural – including the debt explosion.

Unemployment, under- and precarious employment and a massive reduction in basic services (housing, education, welfare etc.), together with crises in agriculture, have had a massive impact on the ability of millions to survive.

All this particularly impacts on women both in paid and unpaid work. More women are in precarious employment, the informal sector or in areas where unemployment has soared. Cuts in services increase the amount of domestic labour needed to reproduce the household – a disproportionate amount of which falls on women.

1.2 Rise of far right, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, anti “gender ideology”

The rise of far right, authoritarian and religious fundamentalist currents, which while often linked are not always identical, has specific and disastrous consequences for women.

The renewal of the radical right strengthens a reactionary thrust that aims to undermine the rights of women and LGBTIQ people; abortion, family law, and triggering witch hunts against LGBTIQ people. They particularly target women who experience both racism and sexism. In many western countries they use Islamophobic propaganda, especially against Muslim women. Aggression against women wearing the veil is increasing.

While some movements clearly attack women and LGBTIQ people, often presenting homosexuality and LGBTIQ rights as imperialist exports, others use homonationalism and femonationalism: under the pretext of defending women and LGBTIQ people. They attack groups like migrants or Muslims, accusing them of rape, or claiming that Islam is against homosexuality. As a result, the far right can experience tensions between those who want to appeal to the sexism and heterosexism of its base and those who instrumentalize women's and LGBTIQ rights in the service of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant prejudice. However, in fact they reinforce each other.

These practices impose oppressive power relations on women's bodies and lives. Religious legal codes heavily depend on the family unit and the segregation of gender roles which endanger women's lives.

Other far right currents emerge as religious fundamentalism in all the “great” religions (or “national religious” fundamentalism such as the Zionist far right). They influence governments as important as the United States and Brazil and play a central role in some East European countries. Whether as evangelism or Roman Catholicism, extremist Christian currents are wreaking havoc in Latin America and Africa with deeply reactionary policies concerning women – notably on the question of abortion and women's right to choose – and LGBTIQ people with anti-gender ideology which seeks to prop up traditional male and female roles and attack LGB and particularly trans rights. The Muslim world has no monopoly; but has a particular international dimension, with “cross-border” movements like the Islamic State or the Taliban. Theofascist movements use systematic sexual violence against women and minors in the territories they control, mostly in the form of rape and sex slavery. They use this to recruit members and fight against other groups.

Neoliberal conservatism that aims to strengthen the patriarchal family has dramatically increased violence against women. Besides impunity for the perpetrators, cuts in material support to those experiencing this violence creates a social environment that encourages male violence.

1.3 Climate disaster

The climate disaster announced for the future is already present in many regions of the globe.

Indigenous peoples, peasants and youth are at the forefront of environmental struggles, and women play a leading

role in these three sectors. This situation is the product of their specific oppression, not their biological sex – as the non-essentialist ecofeminists have shown. Patriarchy imposes social functions on women directly linked to “caring” and places them at the forefront of environmental challenges.

Women produce 80 per cent of basic food in the countries of the South, they are thus directly confronted with the ravages of climate change and agribusiness. Similarly, they take on most of the child-rearing and home maintenance tasks and so are directly confronted with the effects of environmental destruction and poisoning on the health and education of their communities. The self-organization of victims of climate chaos and their defence are part of the climate struggle, women in their communities are at the heart of these mobilizations.

1.4 Massive migration

There are significant population displacements: 250 million international migrants, 750 million internal migrants (displaced persons...) often due to structural economic changes with significant regional disparities. There is also permanent displacement due to wars, and now climate change. Two-thirds of international migration is between countries of a comparable level of development.

Women's migration in the context of crisis deepens and increases oppression and impacts on women's exploitation. The context is extreme impoverishment and loss of rights. Women migrate in search better living conditions for themselves and their families, or because of political persecution, or as a consequence of wars. In this context women face gender discrimination, racism and exploitation. Women are also suffering “new” forms of work practically akin to slavery: confinement, prostitution and being trafficked.

Industrialized countries could easily welcome migrants but instead those forced to leave their homes have often become the target of xenophobic campaigns that are used to present them as enemies. This has especially significant consequences for women as repressive laws are used to break up families.

1.5 Crisis of reproduction

Capitalism has always had to ensure the reproduction of the labour force without which it could not function: reproduction of labour power is an integral part of the cycle of valorization of capital.

The patriarchal capitalist family form, reinforced by notions of the “breadwinner wage”, throwing onto women within the family the responsibility for the tasks of reproduction, enabled capitalism to ensure this reproduction at least cost to itself.

This was an uneven process not only because the growth of capitalism itself was uneven, so that today we see pre-capitalist remnants remaining in some parts of the globe, but because for both economic and political reasons different patterns developed in different situations.

When capitalism needed the mass of women to be a part of the labour force – notably in the post war boom of the advanced capitalist countries – it was compelled, in different ways depending both on the relationship of forces and the precise nature of the local economy, to provide some services through the state: education, healthcare, housing, childcare etc. The paid work that resulted, seen as female because it corresponds to women's role in the family, was and is low paid and overwhelmingly performed by women, often ethnic minority and/or migrant women.

But as capitalism has gone into deep economic crisis, it has been compelled to attack those very services through

austerity; aiming to retain women in the labour force, but trying to further drive down their wages and conditions. The contradictions thus unleashed have increased the burden on many women, compelled to do the work that previously the state had covered. They have also pushed many women out of the labour market or into even more precarious work. They have further created an increasing demand for even worse paid and more precarious women – including undocumented migrants – to do this work to enable other women to keep their place in the labour market. This in turn throws an increasing burden on the women family members of those migrant women to care for the families left in the country of origin. This also poses a contradiction for capitalist states with their desire to limit migration.

2. What are the factors that caused this rise

2.1. Gains of the previous waves

The new generations have been able to benefit – in an uneven but combined way – from the achievements of the women's and LGBTIQ movement of previous waves: first, in formal rights, changes in family and legal codes, women's access to education and health, second, in reproductive and sexual rights and freedoms, and third, in openings in the professional, academic, cultural, political and media worlds. In several countries socialist (class struggle) feminist tendencies have successfully fought in – and with – the labour movement to improve labour rights.

2.2 Feminization of labour

Women work everywhere more than men... but part of their work is invisible: women continue to account for more than three-quarters of the world's unpaid care work. (In the countries of the global South, women work on average 9h20 per day as against 8h07 for men, but they are paid only 5h10 against 6h40 for men. Women and men therefore work 4h10 and 1h30 unpaid respectively. In the North, the figures for women and men are respectively 8.10 and 7.40 hours of daily work, of which 3.30 and less than 2 hours are unpaid.)

Nevertheless, women are increasingly accessing the global labour market even if the gap with men persists.

Between 1980 and 2008, 552 million women entered the labour market. Globally, 4 out of 10 workers are women. In this period there was a significant increase in the female labour force in Latin America: from a quarter to a third in Central America and two fifths in South America.

In areas of a traditionally low rate of paid work for woman, such as North Africa, the percentage increased from 20 to 26; and in Western Asia from 23 to 27. The percentage has not changed much in Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where it was already over 40%, as well as in Southern Africa: 40%. This trend continues but has weakened in the 21st century.

And they have access to lower quality jobs!

Everywhere women are more likely to be obliged to work part-time. This underemployment can reach up to half of total female employment. Globally, nearly half of all women workers are in what the ILO calls "vulnerable employment", particularly in agricultural enterprises, handicrafts and trade. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, this exceeds 70%. (Underemployment can reach up to 40 or 50% of total female employment: 52.4 in Madagascar, 35 to 40% in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Indonesia, more than 25% in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Paraguay.)

Neoliberal globalization has profoundly changed the structure of the economy and jobs

Overall, employment has shifted over the past twenty years from agriculture to industry and then to services, which employ about half of the workforce.

A quarter of the world's female workforce still works in agriculture, which remains the main source of employment for women in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. But economic policies favour export-oriented sectors, mostly male, at the expense of food crops. As women constitute the majority of the world's small-scale farmers, their situation is still fragile.

The presence of women in industry has declined since 1995. In general, they are concentrated in sectors such as textiles and clothing. In special economic zones (free trade zones), export industries employ a majority of women, often very young, and combine low wages with lack of social protection, dramatic working conditions and gender-based violence.

From 1995 to 2015, the share of services in women's employment became predominant on a world scale. Women everywhere are concentrated in certain sectors of activity: trade in middle-income countries, health and education in high-income countries. Overall, the high presence of women is associated with a high frequency of part-time work and relatively low wages, especially in sales, cleaning and catering. Their over-representation in health, education and social work is directly linked to gender stereotypes that devalue the qualifications required in these fields.

But more generally, flexibility and special conditions of hardship, including the ability to perform a variety of tasks and emotional involvement, require "typically feminine qualities" that shape new forms of servility.

The wage gap between women and men, on a global average, is estimated at 23%. Almost 40% of women do not contribute to social protection. As a result, 200 million women who have reached retirement age have no pension at all. A total of 70% of the world's poor are women.

The "feminization" of work concerns all workers

This must be understood not only as the increasing numerical participation of women in the labour market but also in the sense that, under the impact of neoliberal policies, the characteristic conditions of the situation of women at work: precariousness, instability, vulnerability, underemployment, lack of rights and social protection, low unionization rates... tend to extend to the entire proletariat. The precariousness of employment is constantly increasing, accounting for almost half of total employment. So does the share of the informal economy, which concerns more than six out of ten workers and four out of five companies in the world.

The boundaries between paid work and leisure tend to blur – as in reproductive work – (you have to be at the service of bosses 24 hours a day) as well as those between personal and professional life. The use of feminized capacities and characteristics such as a conforming to their idea of attractiveness, flattering their egos, doing social reproduction chores such as shopping for them which are not part of the job, empathy, multitasking are required... at the service of the company.

2.3 The increase in gender-based violence

Violence against women, socially constructed and then normalized by the state, enjoys impunity. Violent deaths occur in a complex web of discrimination and exploitation of women, by gender, and also by class, ethnicity, multiple

risk situations, marginality, insecurity, militarization, migration, among others.

More than a third of the world's women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lives. (WHO figures for 2013: 35.6% at the lowest level) The majority of women killed are killed by a partner or former partner. There is an escalation of gender-based crimes further aggravated by the 2008 crisis. The increasing economic, psychological and sexual independence of young women makes them the object of "reprisals" by male members of their families. Hate crimes to "correct" the behaviour of women, lesbians, trans people, or indeed anyone who "betrays" conservative codes are legitimized by the right-wing political and religious opinion makers.

The neoliberal world order destabilizes all societies and social relations. In particular, the destruction of public services and social protection has an impact on family structures, increasing the tasks and responsibilities of care for women and reducing the opportunities to escape violence.

At the same time, austerity policies tend to reduce funding for centres and shelters for women victims of violence.

Femicide, today recognized as one of the extreme forms of gender violence, is the murder and death of women resulting from diverse forms of violence: physical, sexual, psychological, family, labour, institutional. This new form of extreme violence originally appeared in Ciudad Juarez in Mexico in 1993, it then increased throughout the country and is now recognized as a global and regional phenomenon in Latin America. The slogan Ni Una Más! coined by Mexican women, which became the slogan Ni Una Menos of the Argentine women 22 years later – today taken up throughout the world – is the palpable evidence of the persistence and the increase of this form of misogynist and macho violence and of the impunity and violation of human rights. Women in many countries organize to search for their disappeared daughters and to demand state justice in cases of femicide. By taking the name of the victims these campaigns often become emblematic cases.

The MeToo movement, detonating in the United States, has had a global impact. Women have publicly denounced sexual harassment in different cultural, professional and social spheres and harassment at work thus breaking the silence and at the same time showing the obstacles they face in doing so in a formal framework, and began to establish a legitimacy for public denunciation.

A new generation of young feminists has responded and reacted to sexual violence in universities by confronting university authorities and demanding responses and mechanisms to deal with sexual assaults.

In many countries, women are disappeared to be used as sexual slaves by trafficking and organized crime networks.

In many conflicts, rape is used as a weapon of war. There are a variety of motives behind this, from community humiliation to ethnic cleansing and the terrorization of civilian populations.

The tendency to reduce the labour force, as a result of capitalist globalization, increases women and children's migration (including children traveling alone). Migrant women have a higher rate of unemployment than men. Their conditions of labour and employment are linked to traditional gender roles.

This makes women more vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual violence, disappearances, prostitution, trafficking, extortion, separation from their families (many travel with children), arbitrary detention, illness, accidents and femicide. As they are often responsible for children traveling with them, they become double targets and the difficulties increase because their status as undocumented workers makes it more difficult to obtain employment or services for them and their children.

In the last two decades, under the pressure of the feminist movement demanding that the state assume responsibility and establish new legal frameworks to deal with violence, many countries have introduced legislation and public policies to confront inequality and address violence against women and feminicide. However, in practice they have not been able to eradicate violence. On the contrary it is increasing while also becoming more visible through the energy and determination of women in denouncing it.

The obstacles faced by women who experience violence in accessing justice are related to gender discrimination, prejudices of inferiority of women and stereotypes that sustain a systemic culture and ideology. Women activists, human rights defenders, feminists who fight for the defence of women victims of violence face hostility and threats, are criminalized, and in some cases forced into exile.

2.4 The increased role of women in society and social movements

Women have always been active participants in movements challenging the established order, revolts for bread (or its equivalent), battles against exploitation and tyrannies. But it is in recent decades that women as political subjects have clearly emerged at the forefront of mobilizations of all kinds. From the environmental and territorial defence battles, led by peasant and indigenous women, but also within urban movements, against the predatory and devastating action of multinationals on questions of land and water; in the struggles for human rights and against state and paramilitary repression, mobilizations against racism and the criminalisation/exclusion of migrants...

Just to name a few: Maxima Acuña and her battle against mining in Peru; Berta Caceres, human rights defender in Honduras; Alaa Salah, leader of the democratic revolt in Sudan; Black lives matter in the USA; Greta Thunberg in the young global movement against the climate change Fridays For Future. Dayamani Barla, Jharkhand, India, leading a mass mobilization against the largest steel company ArcelorMittal, the Maasai Women's Pastoral Council in Loliondo, which leads the struggles for land. Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA), a grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women in San Francisco Bay that played a key role in the approval in 2013 of the law on domestic workers' rights.

Women lead community resistance such as the women's march demanding protection of land, health and education belonging to more than 100 indigenous peoples in Brazil. Or the leading role of indigenous women in Ecuador, outraged by the economic measures that sought to end fuel subsidies, impacting their daily lives.

We are thus seeing a phenomenon of women's increasing active and leading role in the social and political movement, entering fully into the national political process, as has been the case of Brazil against Bolsonaro, in the United States against Trump, in Ecuador against the IMF, and in other countries against the multiple attacks on neoliberal policies.

If we look more closely, we see that these are in fact struggles linked to the question of the defence of life, of social reproduction in the ecological, economic, social, cultural and sometimes spiritual sense.

These struggles go hand in hand with an increased awareness among the protagonists of the prevailing gender inequality in their own environment and in society in general. Structural male violence against women is becoming all the more unbearable.

The new feminist upsurge and the increasing important role of women in social movements have allowed the apparition of a new type of female political figures. The election of Ada Colau and our comrade Teresa Rodríguez in the Spanish State, the new (non-white) speakers from the left of DP in USA like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, or Marielle Franco in Brazil, are some examples.

2.5 The antecedents of the new wave

During the previous wave of the women's movement efforts were made for international coordination. In the late 1970s, the International Campaign for Abortion Rights was founded, which evolved and became the still active Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights. The first of the ongoing biannual Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros were held in Colombia in 1981. It was that conference decided to mark 25 November as a day against violence against women, this was adopted in 1995 by the UN as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The World March of Women against Poverty and Violence was born in 1998 in the wake of the 1995 Beijing UN Women's Conference but directed to grass roots women and street action. It had a certain success during the period of the Social Forums and still exists in some countries.

These attempts at international coordination went alongside moments of the rise of aspirational social movements on an international level and suffered from the same decline as those movements. However, the NGOization of the women's movement has enabled a certain international coordination to continue. There have been international meetings of rural women on the issue of food sovereignty (Nyeleni - Mali 2007); and the growing feminist positioning of Via Campesina, the major international peasant network, has developed.

At the same time, all the social revolts or revolutions that have broken out in recent decades have seen a strong participation of women who have developed their own framework for analysis and action within their movements: from the women's law of the Zapatistas movement, to the presence of women in the movements of Tahiri Square, Occupy, 15M, in the "Arab spring" and last but not least, the stunning example of Kurdish women combatants. In all these movements, it is no longer a question of prioritizing struggles, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, democratic, anti-racist and anti-patriarchal, but on the contrary, an intersectional feminism that approaches all oppression in a combined way is beginning to emerge clearly.

2.6 Overcoming liberal and reformist feminism

Meanwhile, in highly industrialized countries that had experienced a certain degree of welfare state during the postwar boom, liberal and reformist feminism have emerged as a by-product of the second wave of feminism.

Reformist feminism is characterized by the incorporation of feminist demands and often activists into social-democratic and other reformist parties, notably when they are in local or national government, adopting policies and giving funding for projects inspired by the women's movement but with little or no self-organization.

Liberal feminism focuses on the feminization of enterprises, administrations and mainstream culture, without questioning their class and racial character, and on the contrary acting as an alibi for the exploitation of other social classes: immigrant, racialized, poor... This is what Nancy Fraser calls "lean in feminism" and has worked as a brake on new generations and other layers of non-privileged women identifying with feminism. It led to many illusions about the idea of the gradual integration of women – which women? – in the governing bodies, by breaking the famous "glass ceiling".

In the so-called Third World countries, the phenomenon of "NGOization" has developed i.e., the conditioning and progressive neutralization of women's movements within NGOs and within the framework of UN meetings, financed and professionalized by them to the detriment of their radicality and self-management.

Given the worsening living conditions and precarity following the 2008 crisis, in contrast to these gradualist illusions, the movements born in the 2010s have developed in clear opposition to this approach.

3. What are the specificities of this movement

The current cycle of mobilizations has its own characteristics, derived from the context in which it is occurring. On the one hand, we find questions that are specific to the historical period (of the crisis of the left, of the political subjects, of the neoliberal individualism that creeps into all spheres, of the distrust towards the political, of the loss and re-encounter with concern for strategy, etc, etc.) and, on the other hand, we find ourselves with our own forms of struggle, with a new grammar of the feminist movement. We start from the idea that at this moment the feminist movement is a creative movement that is able to put on the table new debates and new tools to change the world.

3.1 Geographical spread

The mobilizations have spread throughout the planet, acquiring greater resonance in Latin America and the periphery of Europe. Argentina, Brazil, Spain and recently Mexico are leading these mobilizations that have spread and are spreading elsewhere. The struggle for the right to one's own body, for the right to decide and the decriminalization of abortion as well as the struggle against macho violence (and in particular against femicide and sexual violence) have been the main axes of mobilization.

The Feminist Strike has become a central articulating axis of the feminist movement at the international level, extending to the whole planet. But the most important thing is to understand how this feminist strike connects with a moment in which women are in the front line, as vanguard, of the fightbacks against neoliberal policies, and to understand that these fightbacks have their own form in each country. In the U.S., it is articulated around the rejection of Trump. In North Africa and the Arab region the role that women are playing in social and political mobilizations is undeniable.

The struggle against macho violence has also succeeded in articulating the movement at the international level, creating links, from Latin America to India and Europe. Although initiatives such as #metoo stand out due to the media coverage obtained, this identification with others and the focus on sexual violence has gone beyond these initiatives, in a continuous activity to make visible, denounce and self-organize in the face of such violence.

3.2 New generations

The irruption of young women in the mobilizations is growing and these new generations bring with them a new way of understanding feminism and political work, starting from their own personal experience of daily macho violence. In many cases, youth have come hand in hand with a questioning of hegemonic institutional feminism, while mobilizations arise from a crisis of the answers given by that feminism to our problems and needs.

This starting from the personal is not new in the feminist movement, where the personal has always been political, but it does have to do with how the younger generations relate to politics and construct themselves as subjects, how they reaffirm their individual and collective identity, what they expect from the self-organized structures of the movement, how they build spaces of mutual support for feminists. All this has to do with the need for a feminist subject who responds to current challenges, who incorporates these demands, who questions herself, who reinvents herself, etc.

3.3 New concerns

This focus on the personal is expressed in new concerns such as the need for spaces for mutual support within feminist organizations, on the details of debating and decision making, of building inclusive and participatory spaces, etc. and on questions of identity: the importance of sexual and emotional relationships, our gender identities, how we live our identity, valuing our daily lives, rethinking the way in which we relate to each other, etc... in the last instance of putting our lives at the centre, of the importance of affection, of care... Debates about motherhood, about everything that has to do with our bodies and sexuality, about how we use our time and much more. These reflections may have postmodern drifts (with the consequent strategic loss), but on other occasions they contribute to placing in the centre issues that have been present but not central in feminism, and generally absent from the rest of the social and political movements.

New concerns also arise insofar as new subjects have burst onto the social and political scene, such as the trans movement, and are claiming their space. It is not that they did not exist before, it is that today they have a greater political visibility achieved by their own trajectory as a movement.

There is also a concern to incorporate and give visibility to women who have not had a visible role, taking on board questions of racism, racial/ethnic identity, and sexuality and gender identity as well as other issues such as disability, mental illness, elderly, rural vs. city, etc.

3.4 New methods of struggle - feminist strike

The feminist strike appears as the new method of struggle of this cycle of mobilizations, not only for its articulating power but fundamentally for what it means by questioning and broadening the strike as a tool of struggle. The feminist strike breaks the division between the productive and the reproductive, pointing out the connections between the two, and putting the emphasis especially on the reproductive sphere as a strategy to put life at the centre.

The classic strike has never been free of the reproductive aspect: to maintain a strike you need provisions, in an insurrectionary general strike you need to articulate mechanisms of supply, of reproduction of life, of organizing life in another way. Lengthy struggles such as the British 1984-5 miners' strike, which also saw the self-organization of women from those communities to support the strike, do partially reveal many of these issues. That potential of the strike to build an alternative power, to constitute a parallel society with forms of organization of the workers in each and every one of the spheres of life, has much of that dimension of reproduction. However, it has never been recognized as such.

The feminist strike is rethinking the strike as a tool incorporating not only what until now was invisible but also putting on the table what has been elaborated by the feminist movement.

The initiative of the International Women's Strike in 2017 meant a new proposal for international articulation, although women are not organized around the strike proposal in all the different contexts. The new rise of women's mobilization has very diverse organizational expressions in different countries, strongly rooted in the demands and struggles of indigenous communities and nationalities.

3.5 New theoretical understandings (theory of social reproduction, ecofeminism)

The contributions of anti-capitalist ecofeminism and feminist economics theorize how capital clashes with life and how feminism, by reorganizing time and work, can break with that logic and question the system (or set of systems of

oppression), proposing another way of relating to nature and satisfying our vital needs. This rejects the equation made by “essentialist” ecofeminism that women have a special relationship with nature because they give birth. The way in which capitalism has historically responded to its need to ensure the reproduction of the labour force, the assignation of women to this reproductive work, makes women more aware of the needs of life and of material limits and bases. Social reproduction theory develops on this point, on capitalism’s need for reproductive labour, while not falling into the trap of the “Wages for Housework” theorists.

Work, time, body and land/nature thus become the central elements of theories that are currently being elaborated, starting from what has been learned from being in the front row of suffering neoliberal attacks (precarization of life, privatizations, environmental depredation...) and from a theoretical effort to extend the critique of capitalism, to capital accumulation and to the reproductive dimension.

4. What is its strategic importance

In recent years there has been a substantial change in the role of the international women's movement. At present it can no longer be understood only as one that takes up only sectoral issues (demands and proposals that affect a specific part of the population) but there is an attempt to express a certain totality. As feminists and Marxists we need to analyse this change, give it the correct importance and readjust our strategic understanding of the feminist movement.

4.1 Leading resistance of the dominated classes as a whole

As discussed elsewhere in this document, the new feminist movement emerges in a context of a strong crisis of social reproduction. We know how the economic and financial panic of 2007–08 served as an excuse to deploy a whole series of measures focused on the recovery of the rate of profit through the socialization of the risks of the accumulation process (socialization of losses through the state purchase of private debt, among other mechanisms) and the re-privatization of the risks of the process of sustainability of life: cuts in social aid, privatization of important parts of the health systems and care for dependents, increase in school fees, generalized increase in the cost of living and so on.

The immediate consequences of this double process are twofold: the generalization and worsening of precarious living conditions, which affect more and more people, and in more severe situations, reducing the margin between precariousness and exclusion; and the appearance of a crisis of social reproduction in the countries of the global North similar to that which already existed in the countries of the South, linked to a phenomenon of “peripheralization of the centre”. It is women who have endured the crisis and woven the safety nets of last resort, in many cases at the cost of their own exhaustion and the lifelong limitation of their opportunities to develop as full and autonomous beings. It is on these margins, in the spaces linked to social reproduction and the increasingly precarious sustainability of life, that the main battles are currently taking place and a new cycle of struggles is being articulated.

We speak, therefore, not only of a rise of the feminist movement, but also of a phenomenon of “feminization of protest”. Broadly speaking, there are five fields in which women are leading the struggles and fightbacks: for public services (and, in Europe, against the dismantling of welfare states); for decent housing; for food sovereignty and for the right to land (which have intersected in recent months with the new movements for climate justice and against extractivism); for the improvement of working conditions and the obtaining of rights in what until now were the “margins of the labour market” but which in the current phase of capitalist crisis are expanding and constituting more and more the norm (precarious sectors, informal, zero hours, geographically displaced, etc.), as well as in reproductive jobs; and resistances to the new neoliberalisms.

The consequences of this happening alongside the consolidation of the feminist movement as a fundamental mobilizing vector in many countries, capable of bursting forth in moments of strong ebb and dissolution of social ties bearing profoundly anti-capitalist implications, are multiple. One of the main ones is that the dynamics of permanent mobilization and networking have turned feminism into a school of activist education for many women, who quickly become politicized and can intervene in other fields, generating female references and strong women who exercise diverse models of leadership. It is also worth highlighting the articulation of concrete demands and struggles that are not strictly feminist but much more global: against borders as spaces for systematic humanitarian massacres, against the destruction of land by industrial farming, particularly of livestock, and extractivist multinationals, in defence of civil liberties against extreme right-wing or authoritarian governments, of response and resistance to structural adjustment policies, and so on. The programme of the international women's strike in the different countries gives a good idea of this.

4.2 Does it lead us to reconsider our strategic understanding of the role of the women's movement?

We agree with the intuition, increasingly widespread within the women's movement, that feminist perspectives are an extremely useful point of view for analysing conditions of contemporary exploitation. We might add that they also constitute a privileged point of view for experimenting with new forms of organization and struggle. What is certain is that everything analysed so far has important strategic consequences. Thus, we maintain that feminist strikes and women's strikes can be considered a central experience in thinking about how most effectively to organize not only women but the bulk of the working class. And on the other hand, the way in which feminist mobilizations for the right to abortion or against femicide and macho violence are being articulated opens up a whole field of direct confrontation with the state of the class enemy and its institutions: Justice, the Army, and so on.

The feminist movement allows a process of democratization of the strike tool that is likely to have long-term consequence: breaking with the monopoly of trade union bureaucracies over legitimately calling strikes. The 8 March mobilizations of the last two years have allowed a non-negligible layer of women workers to organize a strike, in many cases for the first time in their lives. Self-confidence, empowerment, accumulated experience and the networks established by thousands of women can mean a qualitative leap for the whole class that can only be evaluated with the passage of time. The other element of democratization is the organization of the strike in sectors too often forgotten by the traditional trade union movement, such as care or consumption, which nevertheless were important in the labour movement of the beginning of the 20th century: the strikes against high prices or rents are good examples. In this sense, the democratization of the strike allows us to experience this tool on the margins of the labour market that we mentioned earlier, and reinforces the idea that these activities are also and above all work.

The use of the strike tool, the centrality of the struggles for social reproduction, the aspiration to understand the processes of production and reproduction as an integrated whole, and its functioning as a vector of politicization and radicalization of the masses, make this new feminist movement itself a process of class consciousness (becoming a class for itself). On a global scale, the feminist movement is redefining antagonisms and becoming a feminist class struggle. The potential of women to fulfil this role in the current historical moment does not depend on any essential identity, but starts from our role in the process of social reproduction, which makes our interests coincide with the interests of humanity.

This does not mean that previously feminism was not related to the class struggle, nor that Marxism and feminism have become one single thing, nullifying the autonomy of the latter. Rather, in the current context of capitalist crisis, historically concrete forms of reproduction of capital contradict the social sustainability of life in more and more regions of the world and are incompatible with basic feminist demands, making any feminist consciousness end up confronting the pillars of capitalist accumulation.

One of the strategic challenges of the moment is reflecting on how feminism is allowing the rediscovery of slogans

such as jobs sharing – this time in the plural, the drastic reduction of the working day linked to the socialization of reproductive work, rethinking which jobs are socially necessary, but also which economic activities should cease because they are destructive for people or the planet, etc. In the face of capitalist irrationality and the waste of resources and human energy that it generates, we must propose a reorganization of the work in an ecosocialist and feminist direction. This is a fundamental task in the phase we are in. The processes of accumulation and the crisis of neoliberal governance have opened a new, virulent, and in many cases violent, cycle that seeks to redefine the mechanisms of exploitation, domination and oppression. Disputing that redefinition will be key to its outcome.

5. What is our orientation and what are our tasks within the movement ?

We stand for building a broad mass inclusive movement and fight to preserve the broadest possible unity; however this does not imply we do not fight for a political orientation for the movement.

5.1 Demands that address the needs of the most oppressed/exploited while building unity between (a) the broadest women's resistance against the right, (b) feminism for the 99% (women's strikes etc.) and (c) revolutionaries.

While the fundamental demands for women's rights are in the interests of all women, ensuring that they become a reality for all women means that we have to pay attention to demands for the necessary funding and resources so that they become a reality even for the most deprived and marginalized women. Thus, while we fight for example to win legal gains concerning the right to abortion or for justice for women victims of violence, we have to also fight for resources for the health, legal and counselling services that help women access these. We also have to fight for non-discriminatory rights to access such services, without any discrimination against women for reasons of legal status, resources, ethnic or migrant background, sexuality or gender identity.

We thus fight to ensure that demands that come from the most marginalized groups are championed by the movement as a whole, as well as opposing discriminatory behaviour within the movement itself.

At the same time we fight to demonstrate in practice that the current system is incapable of truly satisfying women's demands so that women's organizing is an ongoing process of politicization and radicalization.

5.2 Mass self-organized action

This process of politicization and radicalization is also strengthened by the experience of grassroots self-organization, whether in the neighbourhoods, the rural areas, the workplaces or places of study. We therefore place the emphasis on collective action, organized by those concerned. When campaigns are launched by small groups or collectives of feminist women, we fight to turn them towards the mass of women in the neighbourhoods, the workplaces etc by popularizing demands using appropriate means to reach out (leaflets, street theatre, flash mobs, open discussions, petitions, social media) and proposing actions (pickets, demonstrations etc) that are open to and encourage participation from all women. Where contact with institutions is necessary, we fight for representatives to be democratically chosen and for them to be accountable through reporting back in a democratic forum to the women involved.

The proposal of the feminist/women's strike enables such an orientation of mass action to address all women, those in the workplaces, in the informal sector, at home, by touching on all aspects of women's lives in both productive and

reproductive work. We call on men to support the women's strike, by assuming – at least for 8 March – the invisible care work so that their partners, friends and colleagues will not be limited in their participation to all the actions planned during that day. In workplaces means participating in the strike in order to do that. As revolutionary Marxists we also explain, and hope to show in practice, the weight of collective action in workplaces in the fight to build a favourable relationship of forces.

5.3 Importance of international coordination

In a world where our opponents – the capitalist system, the rising authoritarian, far right and fundamentalist forces, the multinational climate destroyers – are internationally organized, the women's movement too must build and strengthen its international links.

The lack of structural organization, while a strength of a radical movement, makes international coordination – requiring as it does money and resources – difficult to achieve, thus building a real international coordination between the radical and self-organized movements developing today remains a task to be achieved. As an international current we should be in the forefront of building links and promoting all opportunities for international coordination.

5.4. Intersection (articulation) with other social movements

We must not fall into the trap of making a catalogue of movements as if the women's movement is separate and unconnected from the workers' movement, the climate movement, the peace movement, the revolutionary processes underway in Algeria and Sudan, movements against racism and more. Women are in the forefront of these movements and within them are raising the question of the place of women in them – for example challenging the sexual violence used against women.

It is necessary in the women's movement as well as in all other movements to build links between all those who share the same aspiration: to change society so that it is organized in the interest of the many and not the few. This means pointing out how climate change, how racist and migrant policies, how imperialist wars, how austerity policies, how denial of democratic and workers' rights, all affect women in particular and particularly severe ways and seeking to engage the women's movement, or sections of it, in their actions.

It also means fighting in other movements, and in particular the organized workers' movement, that women's specific demands are also demands of those movements.

6. Our internal tasks

Women's liberation work is not simply a sector of work in itself but something that must influence every other area of our work and our entire organization.

Although we can legitimately claim to have been in the forefront of revolutionary Marxists in taking women's questions seriously – starting from our 1979 resolution, our 1991 resolutions including on women in the party, and subsequent contributions – this has been the result very often of a very voluntarist effort by a small number of comrades.

Our women's work must continue to be organized on an international basis combining regional (continental)

The new rise of the women's movement

coordination with international coordination and a strong link with the international leadership bodies – through the IC Women's Commission, regular women's seminars and other appropriate forms. This must reflect organized work at national level.

Our history has shown us that without specific bodies to organize our women's work it tends to decline alongside the decline of the strength of the movement. Our commitment to the importance of women's liberation in a programme for a socialist future has to be matched by our commitment to continue political activity and education within our own ranks on the question.

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.