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Women

There is a new wave of Feminism! Organising for our future and the planet!

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It's been a tough couple of years both personally and politically. On a personal level, I had serious health issues which, of necessity, required me to pull back from political organising and participation (my doctors actually told me to stop going to demonstrations). That this has happened in a period of massive political upheavals has really made the situation even more frustrating and alienating. This political crisis alongside of a continuing economic crisis of international capitalism (and part of the crisis as well) has exacerbated the situation due to its impact on the majority world-wide.

A political ideology, fascism, that we hoped to have eliminated has revived internationally (and its political organisation is being coordinated internationally), there are widespread attacks on women (e.g., reproductive rights, violence against women, attempts to redefine rape) and increased racism which has come on the back of increased refugees fleeing war zones, climate change, and poverty. Rising attacks on the LGBT community are, of course, part and parcel of this attack. The attempted normalisation of misogyny, racism, and homophobia is frightening; rarely does a day go by without a reminder of the times we are living in; the economic rights that the working class had fought for so hard and for so long are being eroded, our trade union movement weak and unable to act to overcome these attacks. It's been a couple of years of anger, frustration, exhaustion and worry; emotions that wear you down and make you feel as though you are shovelling shite against the tide constantly.

Yet we see some positive signs of fightback against this misogyny (everyday sexism would almost be a relief compared to what many of us are living through), racism, intolerance, destruction of the planet and violence at so many levels that manages to bolster you allowing you to see that people are fighting back at all levels creating a movement that not only includes the young, but is often led by it. They are fighting for their future and the future of the planet.

Last weekend, I attended a women's seminar in Amsterdam in which participants came from 23 countries, was made up of women of various ages many of whom were women of colour. At the seminar we were attempting to determine whether we are witnessing (and participating) in a new wave of feminist organising and how do we concretely fit into it while advancing a working class dimension where the voices of women of colour are heard as an essential part of the wave. Moreover, we discussed what the ideological components (i.e., social reproduction theory (for example: social reproduction) and ecofeminism (see also Maria Mies) which we viewed as essential to understand women's oppression and developing from that to identify ways of mobilising women to fight together in solidarity along issues that are more relevant to working class and women of colour to address the oppression we live with daily and to advance the struggle so that it will continue when the wave passes. [\[1\]](#)

These women's seminars represent a place of renewal for me in many senses; hearing what women are struggling against and fighting for in countries around the world revives me and reminds me that while we are still fighting against the oppression of women that there is a fight and it is growing. Once again women are at the spearhead of a not only a struggle against their own oppression, but leading the struggle against economic exploitation and protecting our planet. In many countries while the term feminism is not used, it is women that organise against our oppression, exploitation and destruction of the planet – so whether it is around the struggles of women against oppression, organising to protect working people and the planet, this is a fight-back that is happening at many levels from the grass-roots, to our workplaces, in struggles against austerity, fighting for our futures nationally and internationally.

What is meant by “a wave”?

It is generally agreed that there have been two waves of feminism so far. Waves can be defined as struggles that are international in scope and have themes around which organisation and struggle emerge.

The first wave of feminism began in the late 19th century and was organised around women's (and universal) suffrage as a cross-class movement and issues of property rights; but it also had a strong working class dimension which organised working class women both politically (elimination of property qualifications) and economically (for example, participation in political movements fighting racism (e.g., Jim Crow and anti-lynching movements), sexism and our civil rights, into trade unions and into socialist organisations) along class lines. [2] The creation of International Working Women's Day as the 8th of March came out of this struggle. This period of struggle took place over decades; recognition of the reality of the lives of working class women, their economic exploitation, their struggles around caring for their families outside of the capitalist economic sphere led to a massive shift in political consciousness and involved women in the political and economic movements of the time. While the term feminist was primarily used by the upper class women's movement tied to the struggle over suffrage and was derided by socialist women for the most part; this wave cut across class lines and addressed economic and political issues and began a wave of struggle transforming the place of women in capitalist societies of the time.

The second wave of feminism followed on (and learned from) the struggle for civil rights by Blacks in the US and anti-colonialist struggles. [3] It began in the 1960s and lasted through the 1970s after which it came under sustained attack and disappeared into the universities from the streets. While this movement began as an individualist movement and the development of women's consciousness, it shifted towards a notion of women's liberation addressing issues of women's sexuality, reproductive rights, violence against women and women's economic exploitation (e.g., equal pay for equal work and equal pay for comparative work due to women being trapped in “traditional women's labour”) and tried to locate the basis of women's oppression and address solutions to the problem; e.g., the Equal Rights Amendment in the US, feminist collectives, fighting for socialism.

A broader movement than the first wave; it also contained different currents such as liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist (Marxist) feminism; the differences between the forms of feminism relate to whether they think that women's oppression can be eliminated through reforms in the system, whether a radical transformation of society is required and/or whether a systemic change itself is needed (the latter two do recognise that reforms are important but think that they are necessary but insufficient to eliminate women's oppression). Is our oppression due to our sex (more biologically defined) or gender (social oppression) or a combination of both is raised in this wave and still remains a point of debate in the women's movement. [4] The creation of women's movements of colour due to the failures of liberal feminism to address differences in history, experiences of racism, differing economic exploitation and access to wealth and hence the differing needs of women of colour is heightened during this period; struggles for reproductive rights due to the issues of racism, class and gender create different needs for women and these differences are highlighted in the struggles of the time.

Whether or not there was a 3rd wave in the 1990s-2000s is still a point of debate. There is no doubt that there are explorations in feminist thought and the incorporation of the needs of women of colour, issues of violence against women, and reproductive rights and justice happened; the issue of whether there is a wave depends on the international basis and the struggles in political movements occur or whether this is confined more to universities and institutions to which feminism retreated after the end of the second wave that divides opinion. To classify as a wave, the movement needs to be on the streets, (e.g., in demonstrations and women's organisations), across countries and strong enough to impact women and get them to self-organise to fight together. While this period certainly has some of these aspects, it is still debated whether it actually formed a wave. However, certainly discussions of intersectionality and development of ideas to organise around do exist in this period, e.g., violence against women, femicide, and reproductive rights are issues that are analysed in this period and which have influenced the new wave of feminism. [5]

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On the other hand, the current period certainly has the aspects of a new wave and that is due to its international dimensions, the issues around which it is organising and mobilisations occurring on the streets and the creation of women's organisations where the struggle is advanced. Like all waves, the development is not equal across countries, but there are new forms of women's organisation that not only address what are traditional women's issues but also general organisation on economic and political struggles in which women lead and participate.

Again there are various currents in this new movement, there are points of debate between these currents and there is the revival of interest and leadership by younger women to develop and hopefully continue the movement itself. Even in countries which lack a national women's movement (e.g., Great Britain) women do come out in solidarity with other women's struggles internationally; over 750,000 women came out on the day of Trump's inauguration in solidarity with the misogynistic and sexist attacks on women in the US.

When Polish women went out on strike to fight in 2016 due to an abortion ban being put in place by a reactionary government; other women came out in solidarity internationally. [6]

In Argentina (which has had a continual national women's movement since the mid-1980s) issued a call for a strike over violence against women following a brutal murder of Lucia Perez leading to the creation of the *Ni Una Menos* movement in which women went out on strike in Mexico, Chile, El Salvador and Brazil with the development of the *Ni Una Menos* movement internationally. [7]

The struggle over women's reproductive rights led to protests in Argentina and many other countries where both protests (and in some cases a women's strike) were organised. In 2017, women in Ireland went on strike to overturn the 8th Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting abortion and forced (and won) a country-wide plebiscite against the ban. In the US, a women's strike movement around a feminism for the 99% occurred in 2018. In the Spanish state, millions of women participated in a strike on the 8th of March throughout the country.

Recently in Switzerland, women declared a women's strike over equal pay and working conditions and violence against women.

This movement is broad, international and already contains a strong international component of solidarity among women.

The issues of violence against women (including the me too movement started by Tarana Burke to raise the violence against women of colour in the US broadened to highlight sexual harassment and violence against women at work. [8]] However, the reality is that I have never met a woman who has not experienced sexual harassment and violence in many forms during our lives), femicide, and domestic violence), women's economic rights (e.g., the waves of strikes by teachers in the US is a brilliant example over the struggle around wages, the conditions of work and the quality of education offered to students), and the struggle over reproductive justice which can be seen throughout the world not only addresses some women's access to abortion, but that of access to safe, free and legal abortions, access to contraceptives and is centered around women's right to bodily autonomy. [9] This new wave is led by younger women and women of colour; like other waves, there are points of division between lean-in feminism (glass ceiling feminism), radical feminist currents and socialist feminists.

Relationships between the LGBT+ movement and the feminist movement already exist in many countries and recognition of the need for solidarity among movements and fighting against the oppression of racism, sexism and misogyny, homophobia and the recognition of the right of gender preference exists. This doesn't mean that there are not differences in the movement; there are differences still on whether oppression is based on sex or gender (or both) and the inclusion of trans women in the women's movement; a bitter struggle exists on the importance of

inclusion of trans women has arisen in many countries (especially in the US and Britain), addressing sex work/prostitution and the agency of women working in this sector of work and fighting for their rights to organise economically into unions. Recognition of the difference between trafficking of women (and children) to force them to work in this sector (opposed by all of the women's movement) and the reality that some women choose this area for their work (as opposed to being forced into the sector due to poverty) has created divisions and a need for a change in analysis of the currents in the movement. The fact that this movement exists in the context of the rise of a mass struggle over climate change and saving the planet and the strong participation (and often a leading role) of women in that movement means a wider dimension to the struggle than what are traditionally women's issues.

Organising a socialist (class based) feminist movement

There already exists a current of class based feminism which addresses the intersectionality of racism, sexism (and misogyny) and class and its impact on the lives of women. The issue is how we can ensure that this inclusive current grows and survives the end of the wave. Waves can last over decades; but they do end (at least that has been the case historically).

So, how can we not only build the current wave with a strong class and ecofeminist based current and try to make sure that the struggles move the movement forwards towards to fight for a better future in which all women's voices are heard and actually listened to? What tactics and methods of struggle would be the most useful means of achieving this?

There are many arenas of struggle, e.g., in our workplaces, our trade unions, in women's organisations directly, raising women's issues in the general mass movements, fighting for women's voices in the struggle to protect our planet.

While many women do think that all we need is a few adjustments or reform under the current capitalist system; the reality for the majority of women is that certainly some reforms are important but our oppression will not be eliminated by these reforms. There is always the danger that these reforms will assist a minority of women not recognising that oppression affects women of different classes differently, that our histories and experiences of racism and homophobia create a far more complicated form of oppression. A bitter pill of the second wave of feminism in the US ensured that abortion was decriminalised but access to abortion was not seen as a positive right for all but a negative right which didn't ensure funding and access for all; different experiences of sterilisation where women of colour, disabled women and poor women faced eugenics and coercive (forced) sterilisation contrasted with the treatment of wealthier white women who were forced to get their husband's permission for a voluntary sterilisation. The struggle over reproductive rights and for reproductive justice must recognise our historically different oppression and give voice to all women. Concentrating on overcoming the glass ceiling does little for women trapped in traditional women's work, where we are underpaid, undervalued and trapped in part-time work to ensure that we can not only provide for our families (in a period where wages have been stagnated) but also continue our roles as primary providers of social reproduction as the capitalist system has demonstrated that while certain forms of social reproduction can be socialised (e.g., education, healthcare, caring), there are vast portions of social reproduction that are done at home in private in the family without pay.

So, the issue becomes how do we develop not only a feminist struggle, but an anti-capitalist feminist struggle which recognises not only the oppression of women under capitalism but fights for the inclusion of women's issues in building a socialist future? Oppression of women will not disappear after socialism, the struggle for women's liberation will continue and not only as a small residual of capitalist oppression.

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The women's strike is an important and useful tactic (although I would not argue it is a strategy) and it has been in use since the first wave of feminism; it was a strike by women textile workers in St Petersburg, Russia (1917) which brought down the Tsar. [10]

Organising women garment workers in NY city (Chicago, Lawrence MA) to fight against their exploitation at work and to improve conditions, wages and health and safety was an extremely powerful form of mobilisation which enabled women being brought into trade unions and many of their demands for reform were achieved during the first wave of feminism.

A book recently written by Cinzia Arruza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser called *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* has laid out the basis of a socialist feminism which discusses the importance of building a Feminist movement for the majority and the use of the women's strike as a tool of organising and a reinvention of the women's strike for a new period of organising. [11]

But the type of mobilisations we can organise will depend on the level of struggle in the various countries in the world and the forms of organisations that exist or can be created. So we need to be building a movement rooted in the struggles that women themselves organise at all levels (grassroots, regional, national and international) where they live, in their communities, where they work, and in solidarity with the struggles of other women around the inclusive principles that address the needs and interests of the majority of women and how to build a feminism that also creates the basis for fighting for the future where women's liberation is a central and important part of not only the current movement but one in which we create an ecosocialist future for the majority where women are an important and equal part of the future and our needs and lives are not an afterthought; where our contributions are as important and valued as that of men. We have many voices, we have ideas, we demand our voice in the future and we want to build it.

July 21 2019

[Anticapitalist meetup](#)

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[1] <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2017/11/12/1714940/-Anti-Capitalist-Meetup-On-the-Oppression-of-Women-and-Violence-Against-Women>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20150226103319/http://gretagaard.efoliomn.com/Uploads/EcofeminismRevisited2011.pdf>
<https://wellsharp.wordpress.com/2008/03/17/ecofeminism-and-the-subsistence-perspective-fostering-cooperation-not-competition/>.

[2] <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/3/10/1840957/-Anti-Capitalist-Meetup-In-Honor-of-International-Women-s-Day-In-the-Words-of-Our-Founding-Mothers>.

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave_feminism.

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_feminism https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_feminism https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_feminism
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_feminism.

[5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femicide>.

[6] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/03/polish-women-strike-over-planned-abortion-ban>.

[7] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/women-strike-protest-argentina-lucia-perez-rape-abduction-murder-16-a7368856.html>.

[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarana_Burke.

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018–19_education_workers%27_strikes_in_the_United_States.

[10] <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/02/03/beyond-lean-in-for-a-feminism-of-the-99-and-a-militant-international-strike-on-march-8/>.

[11] <https://www.feminismforthe99.org/>.