

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/Feminist-strike-for-the-socialisation-of-reproductive-labour>



Feminism

Feminist strike for the socialisation of reproductive labour!

- Features - Feminism -



Publication date: Monday 27 July 2026

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

All over the world, austerity programmes are following one after another, amounting to a privatization of the sphere of social reproduction. This neoliberal phase of capitalism raises strategic questions for the feminist movement. Interview with Gaara and Noémie by Anouk Essayad - all three are activists in SolidaritéS (Switzerland). [\[1\]](#)

You were very active in the mobilizations that took place in October in the canton of Vaud against budget austerity, and you explained at the time that this attack on public services reflected, more broadly, a crisis of social reproduction.

Noémie: The attacks on public services show that the resources allocated to social reproduction—education, care, health, and training—are treated as variables to be adjusted. When public accounts are presented as poor or in deficit, cuts are made in these sectors, on the assumption that this will not have too many consequences. This reflects a certain view of reproductive labour, which is considered a cost rather than an investment in our societies. By contrast, feminist analyses show that these activities are essential to the perpetuation of society and of life, reproducing the labour force on a daily and intergenerational basis. Historically, their collectivization through the public sector freed up time so that more and more workers could participate in the productive sector of the economy.

The place of the social reproduction sector—especially public services—in the functioning of capitalism has been documented and even quantified by Fanny Gallot and Hugo Harai-Kermadec. A tension emerges at the heart of this organisation of social reproduction, and it is reflected in these attacks on public services: on the one hand, the capitalist economy depends on social reproduction labour to ensure its own perpetuation. On the other hand, this sector is considered non-productive; it is often there that capitalism tries hardest to maximize profits by reducing costs.

Gaara: The bourgeoisie has several ways of increasing, overall, the profitability of reproductive labour. The first, against which we were fighting in the autumn, is simply the reduction of resources in public services: this results in lower wages, reduced benefits or access to infrastructure, and fewer staff.

It can also happen through subtler logics, such as the deskilling of social reproduction work. Thus, positions that should require certain qualifications—and therefore wage recognition—are assigned to people who do not have those qualifications. This makes it possible, for the same work, to lower wages and thereby increase the exploitation of public-service workers.

Another way of increasing profits from reproductive labour is through privatization and outsourcing. In these privatized structures, labour law offers much less protection, wages are lower, and the same processes of deskilling are found. This logic of privatization may also be partial and take the form of outsourcing certain tasks in particular, such as cleaning. In this private sector, we observe uberization and integration into the digital economy. This is the case for cleaning, but also for childcare and some educational spaces. It also produces an atomisation of workers, making it more difficult for them to organize.

Finally, the dismantling of public services also redirects reproductive labour into the nuclear family, where it is either unpaid or very poorly paid because it is performed by domestic-economy workers. All these mechanisms are made possible by the naturalisation of reproductive labour and its assignment to women and gender minorities.

Noémie: This maximization of profits in the sector of social reproduction relies on a racialised and internationalised division of reproductive labour. In other words, it depends on the importation of precarious foreign women workers, whose exploitation is linked to migration policies that are both very harsh and very targeted, and which, from the capitalists' point of view, allow for an "optimal" exploitation of labour power. A comrade explained that in the home-care sector, there are platforms that bring in women, notably from Romania, for fixed three-month assignments. These women live in the home of the person receiving care and are paid a tiny wage.

That is seasonal-worker status!

Noémie: Yes, completely. In short, the attacks on public services are a symptom of this crisis of social reproduction. By this we mean the breaking point of this impossible exercise: on the one hand, capitalism's vital need to ensure the reproduction of labour power; on the other, the tendency to destroy this sector, considered non-productive, through the mechanisms Gaara described.

In other words, these cuts have very direct effects on these services' very ability to continue fulfilling their mission. Take the example of nurseries. Continually increasing the number of children one person is responsible for has very concrete consequences for those children's development. When someone has to look after ten children aged between four and seven alone, neglect is inevitable.

Even abuse, right? We have recently seen cases of physical violence.

Noémie: Exactly. This reinforces conditions of vulnerability to mistreatment and violence. In France, some nurseries have cut costs on food, and we have seen children in situations of malnutrition.

This contributes to deepening inequalities in access to the conditions of social reproduction; the most precarious people will be the first to suffer from the privatization of the health-care system, since they cannot afford private care.

Gaara, you work in the health sector at a public hospital. How does this crisis of social reproduction translate for employees?

Gaara: We find the same mechanisms, especially a reduction in the resources allocated to public hospitals. This results in posts not being renewed, services being reduced, and hospitals being closed. Medical deserts are appearing in Switzerland, with concrete effects on the population's health. It also takes the form of privatisation and outsourcing of certain services. In the university hospital where I work, the maintenance of certain medical equipment that is necessary, especially in emergency situations, has been outsourced. We may find ourselves in the middle of the night with a machine that has broken down, whose maintenance has been outsourced to a company that obviously does not work at night, making it impossible to provide certain kinds of care.

The purpose of the public hospital is to provide care universally, regardless of patients' residence status or economic situation. The most precarious people are the first to pay, in their own bodies, for the deterioration of the health-care system.

Moreover, within the hospital itself, we see a division of labour between services with high technical capital—which are billed much more heavily—and services that are closer to care work. This may include managing complex social or medical situations, which are billed much less. We end up with a new gendered division of labour. We can expect the devalued part of this work to be targeted more heavily by austerity logics and the people who perform it to be paid less.

The new neoliberal phase of capitalism sharpens a contradiction. On the one hand, as you have shown, the bourgeoisie needs to open up new productive sectors and privatise a whole range of existing ones. This is the idea of the “spatial fix” discussed by David Harvey: the conquest or creation of new spaces for commodification, not only geographical ones. On the other hand, privatising the social reproduction sector creates a contradiction of its own: it calls into question the very possibility of reproducing labour power, and therefore capitalism itself. What do you think? What strategic questions does this raise, especially regarding the role of the feminist movement?

Gaara: I broadly agree with that analysis. We can also compare this contradiction with the exploitation of planetary resources: capitalism relies on the constant exploitation and expropriation of these resources, to the point of destroying the very environment on which it depends. I think there is a parallel to be drawn between these two dynamics, like a kind of terminal runaway process. That said, we can trust capitalism to find ways, even temporary ones, to resolve these contradictions. The commodification of reproductive labour is one such means. As Noémie has shown, it produces a relocation of this labour—especially through the “importation” of workers into centres of capitalist accumulation—and encourages a productive recovery in this space. This contributes to deepening the care debt from countries of the centre toward those of the periphery. Women workers from the periphery come to reproduce the labour power of countries of the centre, temporarily containing the crisis of social reproduction there.

There is also a consubstantiality between inequalities in access to life—linked to the destruction of public services—and the social Darwinism that is both inherent in liberalism and concomitant with the rise of the far right. These mechanisms operate together: the revival of far-right discourses on the inequality of lives naturalises the situation. In other words, they aim to make it seem normal that people without papers or money die in the street because they do not have access to the basic care needed for the reproduction of life.

Noémie: This contradiction is more striking than ever, even if it has always existed. It is no coincidence that the feminist movements that have redeveloped over the past decade have taken up this question again. The issue now, however, is for all political and trade-union organisations to work on this contradiction.

In Switzerland, a care strike is being prepared for June 2027. How do you see the link between a strike of reproductive labour in paid workplaces and a strike of unpaid reproductive labor carried out in the domestic sphere?

Noémie: This link is a strategic issue. We need to build a care strike that cuts across these spaces. If we focused only on organising public-sector workers, or if the issue were simply to make sure that stay-at-home mothers do not do housework on 14 June 2027, we would miss the point.

We sometimes tend to think of these two dimensions—paid and unpaid labour—as two sides of the same coin. I think we should think of them as a continuum, precisely so that we can build transversal mobilizations. At the same time, we need to be careful with certain arguments that claim paid and unpaid reproductive activities are the same thing and are performed by everyone. That opens the door to devaluing the specific skills acquired by care workers who have trained for these occupations. It also contributes to a renaturalisation of this work.

It also carries the risk of making the racial division of this reproductive labour invisible. Yes, all women do, in one way or another, some form of social reproduction work; but it is not at all the same work, neither in degree nor in nature, and it is not carried out under the same conditions. The CEO of a large company reading stories to her children at bedtime is not the same as her domestic worker taking on almost all reproductive tasks and then doing them again when she gets home.

In my view, we should instead ask the following question: what effects do these attacks, which undermine the conditions of possibility of social reproduction, have on the people who ensure it, whatever the sector? Strategically, we start from the social consequences of this crisis of social reproduction in order to build alliances. The point is to develop demands that allow everyone to express their individual experience of this crisis, but within a shared and collective framework. Concretely, this autumn we saw alliances between paid workers, for example in nurseries, and the beneficiaries of these services, whether parents or children. This also opens spaces for collectively reflecting on alternatives: how can we organize this work of social reproduction differently? How can we socialise it?

Gaara: It also allows us to move beyond a purely defensive approach and open spaces for reflection on the very stakes of this social reproduction. Do we really only want to reproduce labour power for capital?

In 2019, one component—a relatively minor one—of the workers' movement claimed that organizing the feminist strike in chosen mixed spaces without cis men had divided our class in the face of capital's domination. According to these people, organizing a feminist strike had hindered the collective organization of workers. What would you like to say in response to that seven years later?

Noémie: If we think there is a consubstantiality between patriarchy and capitalism, among other things, then precisely, we are not particularizing or dividing. On the contrary, we rethink, in a materialist way—starting from what actually exists in society—what the working class is. We move beyond a somewhat nostalgic vision of a male working class, or one supposedly neutral from the point of view of gender.

A male working class that, moreover, never really existed, not even in Switzerland. In the decade following the creation of the Swiss Trade Union Federation in 1880, women made up 46 per cent of workers employed in industry, and children... 14 percent. Men were therefore a minority.

Noémie: Even beyond paid work, the feminist approach makes it possible to better understand how capitalism functions and how it reproduces itself.

Gaara: They accuse us of doing identity politics, even though their position proceeds from a re-essentialization or renaturalisation of reproductive labour, as if it were performed only by women, which is not true! Precisely, we need to rethink this work, whether it is performed by women or not, as one of the tools for the perpetuation of capitalism and the exploitation of all labour power.

This year, the feminist strike organizations called for convergence with the NO G7 mobilizations, which brought 60,000 people into the streets of Geneva on 14 June. The day before, huge feminist demonstrations took place in Lausanne and Zurich in particular. People often speak of a fascist international, some of whose members were present in Evian in June: in your view, how can the feminist movement participate in the antifascist and internationalist offensive?

Gaara: We need to rethink what anti-imperialist and internationalist feminism is. First, that means uncompromising solidarity with peoples in struggle, including armed struggle, for their self-determination. But it does not end there. We need a feminism that thinks through the consubstantiality of capitalist, imperialist, and patriarchal logics; a feminism that reveals what imperialism produces in gender social relations and, conversely, the way these gender relations serve to reproduce imperialist logics. In short, we must think imperialism as feminists and think feminism as internationalists.

For example, we need to think about imperialist violence against social reproduction, as we see in Gaza, in the genocide carried out by the Israeli occupation army, which has involved the massive and systematic destruction of all

spaces for the reproduction of life.

Another example is found in countries where extractivism is practiced, which, let us recall, is one of the preferred modalities of Swiss imperialism. There we see attacks on places of life and subsistence for local populations in order to gain access to their resources. We also see capital flight, notably to Switzerland, which means that resources are lacking to finance public services.

We also finance part of our own public services with this money, since these multinationals—Vale, Glencore, Nestlé—have their headquarters in Switzerland.

Gaara: Yes, and these countries are subjected to structural adjustment measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund. We see an accelerated destruction—if not the outright nonexistence—of public services, which favours imperialist expansion in these spaces.

One important element concerns the use of sexist and sexual violence in zones of imperialist economic expansion. We can think of the free-trade zones between Mexico and the United States, where femicides—and, more broadly, sexist and sexual violence—are used to terrorize the population.

Finally, here at home, in the centres of capitalist accumulation, we find a discourse of militarization and “demographic rearmament.” Beyond the white-supremacist dimension they contain—with the idea that this is a way to fight a supposed “great replacement”—these discourses reassign women to their role in the reproduction of life: having children who can become soldiers.

In more concrete terms, the first essential thing is to defend freedom of movement and settlement for everyone. But we must also situate our struggles against austerity within an anti-imperialist struggle against the externalization of the care debt onto countries of the Global South. Finally, we must carry forward the struggles and demands of our feminist comrades in the South, even when they are sometimes instrumentalised by the far right for Islamophobic, anti-migrant, reactionary purposes, and so on.

We have also gone through a period marked by the media coverage of sexist and sexual violence, with, on one side, the monstrosities of the Epstein “system” and, on the other, this Rape Academy, a website visited by millions of men who find advice there on how to rape their partner. Some people have used these cases to explain that violence happens everywhere—not only among immigrant or non-white men—but without offering an analysis of the function of this violence. Conversely, others argue that the atrocities committed by Epstein are merely the reflection of the predation or horror of capitalism, without thinking about them as feminists. Where do you stand in relation to these discourses, and how do you understand the function of sexist and sexual violence at the global level?

Gaara: On the question of the Epstein network, reducing this violence to some kind of ontological dimension of a super-bourgeoisie radicalized through the exploitation of bodies misses the point. The Epstein network must be reinscribed within a consubstantiality between gender violence and questions of economic and social vulnerability. The majority of Epstein’s victims were very young women, even children; they were precarious people, sometimes from extremely violent homes. Economically, there were not really any other options for them.

But also at the psychological or social level: a large share of the network’s victims were already particularly vulnerable because they had experienced intra-family violence, especially sexist, sexual, and incestuous violence. This system of incest prepares bodies for violence, exploitation, and vulnerability to economic violence and gender violence.

And this is where we need a global approach: this violence is transversal, including within our own social camp and within our political and trade-union organizations. Shifting the problem onto this ultra-capitalist class, and so on, prevents us from thinking about sexist and sexual violence and violence against children within our own social camp; this violence obstructs our capacity for mobilization because it shatters lives and destroys individuals.

Dorothée Dussy speaks of incest as the cradle of domination. She explains that one child in seven is a victim of intra-family sexual violence. This means that everyone comes into contact with this crushing of psyches and bodies, which, according to her, has a structural function.

Noémie: What strikes me in these successive cases is that we always come back to this idea of a continuum of violence. In the Epstein case, it is the continuum of violence suffered by the victims—in their families, in their workplaces, in shelters, and, of course, within the Epstein network. I feel that we are at a turning point on the question of sexist and sexual violence: there has been a form of recognition of gender violence and a certain institutional response, about which we obviously have many criticisms.

The social psychologist Patrizia Romito explains that the response to sexist and sexual violence over the past 20 years has taken place through a dynamic of particularising these forms of violence. For intimate-partner and domestic violence, one type of response is developed; for sexual harassment at work, another type of response is developed, and so on. This particularisation of the response to sexist and sexual violence is problematic because it prevents us from thinking about them together, as a whole. It also obstructs our possibilities for collective organization, and, in passing, allows institutions to focus on certain types of violence for racist purposes. I am thinking here of street sexual harassment.

We must remember that gender violence has a very specific function under capitalism. In particular, it is a tool for disciplining bodies and psyches. The bourgeois nuclear family is one of the places where this disciplining and subjugation of bodies and subjectivities takes place. That is why, as feminists and as Marxists, we must think of it both as a site where part of reproductive labour is externalized and as a space where this violence is produced.

18 June 2026

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Inprecor](#).

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.

[1] Photo Feminist strike 14 June 2026, Cornavin station, leading contingent NOG7. ©Nattes à Chat/CC BY-SA 40.