



## IV453 - October 2012

# La Via Campesina: Food Sovereignty and the Global Feminist Struggle

30 October 2012, by [Esther Vivas](#)

Since its founding, Via Campesina has promoted a “female peasant” identity that is politicized, linked to land, food production and the defense of food sovereignty—built in opposition to the current agribusiness model (Desmarais, 2007). Via Campesina embodies a new kind of “peasant internationalism” (Bello, 2009), that can be viewed as a “peasant component” of the new international resistance presented by the anti-globalization movement (Antentas and Vivas, 2009).

In 1996, coinciding with the World Food Summit at the FAO in Rome, Via Campesina highlighted food sovereignty as a political alternative to a profoundly unfair and predatory food system. This does not imply a romantic return to the past, but rather recovers knowledge and traditional practices and combines them with new technologies and new knowledge (Desmarais, 2007). As noted by McMichael (2006), there is a “mystification of the small” in a way that rethinks the global food system to encourage democratic forms of food production and distribution.

### A feminist perspective

Over time, Via Campesina has incorporated a feminist perspective, working to achieve gender equality within their organizations, and

building alliances with feminist groups, including the international World March of Women, among others.

At the heart of La Via Campesina, the struggle of women is situated at two levels: defending their rights as women within organizations and society in general, and the struggle as peasant women together with their colleagues against the neoliberal model of agriculture (EHNE and La Via Campesina 2009).

Feminist work in Via Campesina has taken important steps forward since its inception. In the First International Conference in Mons (Belgium) in 1993, all the elected coordinators were men. In the final declaration the situation of rural women hardly received any mention. Although it identified the need to integrate women’s needs in the work of Via Campesina, the conference failed to establish mechanisms to ensure participation of women in successive meetings. Thus, at the 2nd International Conference in Tlaxcala (Mexico) in 1996, the percentage of women attending was 20% of the total: the same as at the 1st International Conference. To address this issue, a special women’s committee was created (later known as the Women’s Committee of La Via Campesina) and methods that permitted better representation and participation were enacted.

This move facilitated the incorporation of feminist analysis in Via Campesina. Thus, when Via Campesina publicly presented the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit of FAO in Rome in 1996, women contributed their own demands. These included the need to produce food locally, and they added the dimension of “human health” to “sustainable agricultural practices,” demanding a drastic reduction in harmful chemical inputs and advocating the active promotion of organic agriculture. Women also insisted that food sovereignty could not be accomplished without greater female participation in the definition of rural policies (Desmarais, 2007).

The work of the Women’s Commission helped promote exchanges between women from different countries, including women-specific meetings to coincide with international summits. Between 1996 and 2000, the Commission’s work focused mainly on Latin America—through training, exchange and discussion—and rural women increased their participation in all levels and activities of La Via Campesina.

In October 2000, just before the 3rd International Conference of La Via Campesina in Bangalore (India), the 1st International Assembly of Women Farmers was organized. This allowed for greater participation of women in the organization. The Assembly adopted three major goals: 1) to

ensure the participation of 50% of women at all levels of decisions and activities of La Via Campesina, 2) to maintain and strengthen the Women's Commission, and 3) to ensure that documents, training events and speeches of Via Campesina did not have sexist content or sexist language (Desmarais, 2007).

Members at the conference agreed to change the institutional structure to ensure gender equity. As Paul Nicholson of La Via Campesina notes: "[In Bangalore] it was determined that equality of man and woman in spaces and positions of representation in our organization opened a whole internal process of reflection on the role of women in the struggle for women peasants' rights. ... The gender perspective is being addressed now in a serious way, not only in the context of parity in responsibilities, but also a profound debate about the roots and tentacles of patriarchy and violence against women in the rural world." (Food Sovereignty, Biodiversity and Cultures 2010: 8).

This strategy forced the member organizations of Via Campesina at national and regional levels to rethink their work in a gender perspective and to incorporate new measures to strengthen the role of women (Desmarais, 2007). Josie Riffaud of the Confédération Paysanne in France, states that: "the decision was critical of [lack of gender] parity in the Via Campesina, as allowed in my organization, the Confédération Paysanne. We also apply this measure." (La Via Campesina, 2006: 15).

As part of the 4th International Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004; the 2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers brought together more than a hundred women from 47 countries on all continents. The main lines of action that emerged from the meeting were to take action against physical and sexual violence against women; both domestically and internationally; demand equal rights and invest in education. As its final statement states: "We demand our right to a dignified life, respect for our sexual and reproductive rights; and the immediate implementation of measures to eradicate all forms of

physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence. ... We urge states to implement measures to ensure our economic autonomy, access to land, health, education and equal social status." (2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers, 2004).

In October 2006, the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina was highlighted in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Participants included women from agricultural organizations in Asia, North America, Europe, Africa and Latin America; with the objective of analyzing and discussing the meaning of equality in the field from a feminist perspective, and a plan of action to achieve it. As one of the presentations "Sergia Galván's Women's Health Collective of the Dominican Republic" pointed out, the women of La Via Campesina had three challenges ahead:

- 1) to advance the theoretical discussion to incorporate the feminist peasant perspective in mainstream feminist analysis,
- 2) continue work on autonomy as a vital reference for the consolidation of the movement of rural women,
- 3) to overcome the feeling of guilt in the struggle for higher positions of power over men (La Via Campesina, 2006).

The World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina emphasized the need to further strengthen the articulation of women of La Via Campesina, and created mechanisms for a greater exchange of information and specific plans for struggle. Among the concrete proposals were the articulation of a global campaign to combat violence perpetrated against women, to extend the discussion to all organizations that are part of Via Campesina, and to work to recognize the rights of rural women in demanding equality in access to land, credit, markets and administrative rights (La Via Campesina, 2006).

At the 5th International Conference in Maputo, Mozambique, in October 2008, La Via Campesina hosted the 3rd International Assembly of Women. The assembly approved the launch of a campaign targeting all forms of

violence faced by women in society (physical, economic, social, sexist, cultural, and access to power) which are also present in rural communities and their organizations.

Work that aims at achieving greater gender equality is not easy. Despite the formal equality, women face obstacles when traveling or attending meetings and gatherings. As Annette Desmarais (2007:282) noted, "There are many reasons why women do not participate at this level. Perhaps the most important is the persistence of ideologies and cultural practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations and unfairness. For example, the division of labor by gender means that rural women have less access to the most precious resource, time, to participate as leaders in agricultural organizations. Being involved in reproductive, productive and community work makes it much less likely [for women] to have time for training sessions and learning as leaders."

It is a struggle against the tide, and despite some concrete victories, we face a long fight in our organizations, and, more generally.

## Weaving Alliances

La Via Campesina has established alliances with various organizations and social movements at the international, regional, and national levels. One of the most significant alliances has been with the World March of Women, a leading feminist global network that has called for joint actions and meetings, and has collaborated in activities: the International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali in 2007, among others.

The original meeting between the two networks was under the anti-globalization movement, and its purpose was to agree on counter-summits and activities within the World Social Forum. The incorporation of a feminist perspective within Via Campesina generated more solidarity, and this has built over time. At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali a meeting was convened by leading international

social movements such as Via Campesina, the World March of Women, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and others to advance strategies within a wide range of social movements (farmers, fishers, consumers) to promote food sovereignty.

Women were a major catalyst in this meeting, as organizers and participants. The Nyéléni Forum in Sélingué was named in honor of the legend of a Malian peasant woman who struggled to assert herself as a woman in a hostile environment. Delegates from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Oceania attended the meeting and identified the capitalist and patriarchal system as primarily responsible for the violations of women's rights, while reaffirming their commitment to transform it.

The World March of Women has taken up food sovereignty as an inalienable human right, especially for women. Miriam Nobre, coordinator of the international secretary of the World March of Women, participated in October 2006 at the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina in the global feminist movement. The 7th International Meeting of the World March of Women in Vigo, Spain in October 2008, held a forum and exhibition for food sovereignty, showing the links between the feminist struggle and those of peasant women.

The success of this collaboration is embodied in the dual membership of women who are active members in the World March of Women, and La Via

Campesina. These experiences encourage closer ties and collaboration between both networks, and strengthens the feminist struggle of rural women that is part of the broader struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.

## Conclusion

The current global food system has failed to ensure the food security of communities. Currently more than a billion people worldwide suffer from hunger. The global food system has had a profoundly negative environmental impact; promoting an intensive agro-industrial model that has contributed to climate change and collapsing agro-biodiversity. This system has been particularly detrimental to women.

Developing alternatives to this agricultural model requires incorporating a gender perspective. The food sovereignty alternative to the dominant agro-industrial model has to have a feminist position to break with patriarchal and capitalist logic.

La Via Campesina, the largest international movement for food sovereignty, is moving in this direction: creating alliances with other social movements—especially feminist organizations and networks such as the World March of Women—to promote networking and solidarity among women in North and South, urban and rural areas, and between them and their companions. As Via Campesina says: “Globalize the struggle. Globalize hope.”

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*This was originally part of a longer article first published in Food Movements Unite! Strategies to Transform Our Food System (Food First, 2011).*

*From the Esther Vivas blog.*

## IV453 - October 2012 PDF

30 October 2012, by [robm](#)

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## “The enemy within” and the centrist forces

30 October 2012, by [Ghayath Naisse](#)

During this broadcast, Assad said "this time, the enemy comes from inside and not from outside... and any Syrian who executes a foreign enemy plan becomes an enemy and is no longer a Syrian". Therefore, the margin of manoeuvre of those components of the opposition who have sought - or are seeking - solutions at the centre, as in Yemen or elsewhere, becomes narrow if not non-existent.

We talk here of the National Coordination Committee of the Forces of Democratic Change [1] and those who adopt its political strategy, one way or the other.

The dictator did not stop there; he described as them "merchants of the crisis". If he did not cite them by name, he spoke of the opposition which called for "dialogue": "We were surprised by the dialogue. It has refused to participate in the dialogue because it had conditioned the dialogue as being between the state and these groups." He described as trying to "opportunisticly win political positions to negotiate with the state".

Responding directly to the invitation issued by the Coordination Committee to hold a congress "for the salvation of Syria" in Damascus in mid-September, the tyrant said: "Recently we learned that they began to talk about dialogue... but if you want to arrive so late, then you need to come sincerely and not again in an opportunistic fashion". And he concluded by speaking to these forces: "you're talking about the rejection of violence and weapons" by requiring of them that they recognize that they had lied in the past or at least that they had "committed an error of judgment".

This speech was a slap in the face to the ambitions of the leaderships of these forces, centrist at the level of their discourse and opportunistic in their practice. They had hoped to hold their planned congress in Damascus, but the dictatorial regime gave its approval on condition that they participated "in the framework imposed, otherwise, they would be in his eyes, like the rest of the opposition, a domestic enemy".

## Centrist positions, opportunistic practice

Criticizing the discourse and the practice of the Syrian political opposition forces, especially in the context of the popular revolution, is not intellectual vanity, but a necessity because political practices which have harmful consequences on the course of the revolution have to be addressed.

From the beginning of the popular revolution, the Coordination Committee and its partner, the Democratic Forum [2], have by their concepts and practices taken an ambiguous position with regard to the revolution and the regime.

The Committee was in fact neither for the revolution nor for the fall of the regime, despite some recent press releases published under the pressure of the revolutionary movement, which could give the illusion to the contrary. Each time, they came back to their original position and attempted to lead in their wake other forces, like the Maan movement and the Watan Coalition [3]. The Coordination Committee has systematically emptied meetings and encounters of their revolutionary dynamics. The fluctuations in the positions of their leaderships - seen as being on the left - have damaged the image of the Syrian left in general and its capacity to act in the revolutionary movement.

The left forces which had joined the Coordination Committee, such as parties like the "Rally of the Marxist left" [4] monopolized its flag for a short period. This "left" decided to conduct its political action through the Coordination Committee, renouncing an independent practice. On the other hand, the forces of the official Communist Parties have defiled the heritage of struggle of the Syrian left very early on by rallying to the clique in power. And the radical left supporting the revolution and militating within it had to stand out quickly from all these opportunists of the "left", whether they are allies of the regime or centrist opponents. This was the role of several left groups

supporting the revolution as the Syrian Left Current [5].

The position of the Coordination Committee has established itself as a component of consensus with its initiative to put an end to violence, announced on August 14, based on an analysis of the "balance of forces" between the forces of the revolution and those of the regime in the shadow of an "international equilibrium not allowing the victory of the two parties over the other". Based on these assumptions, the Coordination Committee placed itself in a mediating role, despite the denials of some of its leaders. Its initiative called for "consensus on a temporary truce between the parties carrying out armed action", in other words, it puts the forces of the revolution and popular resistance on equal terms with the violence and savagery of the regime.

In fact, the Coordination Committee advocated this centrist position from July 26, 2012 in the Rome communiqué, published on the heels of a meeting at which it was the organizational backbone. Also present were personalities from other forces, such as the Watan Coalition. The Rome communiqué says that "weapons are not the solution" and that the situation needs "more than ever a political solution" calling for "renouncing weapons... to get to negotiations excluding nobody". The last paragraph is the prelude to dialogue and negotiations with the regime, so dear to the Coordination Committee.

The Coordination Committee made its final shift to a centrist course in the violent class struggle underway in its last appeal, published on August 28, 2012, for the holding of "a national congress for the salvation of Syria". It said that it will be held in Damascus on September 12 [6], considering that the violence of the regime - this amounted to a rhetorical assertion - "was the cause of the emergence of counter-violence".

So the popular resistance is reduced to "counter-violence". To justify its approach, it centres its statement on the loss by Syria of its national

sovereignty, since she has become "totally dependent on foreign, international and regional decisions". So Syria would be, as a country, society and state, now "completely dependent" on abroad, according to the Coordination Committee, and this would be a justification for the latter to save the country and play a role of mediator between the forces which are "party to the conflict" in Syria. It is no longer a question of the revolution of a people, nor of sacrifices made to confront a bloody dictatorship. The position of the Committee takes shape: neither with one nor the other, it assigns itself the role of mediator.

## The left face of the Coordination Committee

As the "Rally of the Marxist Left" is no more than an appendix endorsing the policy of the Coordination Committee, and has no independent political activity, in the editorial in the latest issue of its publication "The way of the left" (Number 39, August 2012), it has the headline "Against the violence of the opposition" where it announced that the regime has managed to push opponents into "using arms" to "make the opposition lose its moral influence and make it look like the regime". At a single stroke, the armed popular resistance of the masses to the killing of the dictatorship machine automatically becomes "morally decaying". In fact these remarks dramatically illustrate the intellectual failure of a certain Syrian left.

The editorial says that what is happening in Syria is the repetition of the tragedy of Hama in 1982, namely, a conflict between the Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime. It also says that the Muslim Brotherhood "is back, and with them many oppositionists look back thirty years after at the tragedy that had extended the longevity of the Syrian regime...". This miserable argument to justify the conciliatory position of the Committee and its partners of the

"Rally of the Marxist left" is truly deplorable. Only a limited mind can equate the events of the 1980s - the armed struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood against the then regime - with the deep popular revolution going on in our country for eighteen months, where the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists are only slightly influential despite the impressive media and financial support received from Qatar, the Saudi Arabia and Turkey. During the first months of the revolution they were absent from the revolutionary movement, having pursued truce and dialogue with the regime since 2006.

Thus we can understand the agreement of the "Parties of the Popular Front" with the opportunism of Kadri Jamil and Ali Ha'ader, who participate in the government of the dictatorship on the initiative of the Coordination Committee. As well as the approximation of their positions in the fact of the popular revolution, the consensus arrived at meetings of coordination between the Popular Front Government and the Coordination Committee at the beginning of September.

We are witnessing a realignment of the political "left" forces, with two rapprochements, that of the opportunistic and centrist forces, and that of the radical forces. This will lead to renewed pressure on the hesitant forces inside the Maan movement or the Watan Coalition, forces that quickly need to clarify their real political position. They must choose between a clear and radical position on the revolution or a rallying to conciliatory opportunistic policies.

In a context of radicalization of the Syrian masses against the dictatorial bourgeois regime, the conditions exist for developing a radical left cadre committed to the popular revolution, separate from these "left" opportunist and centrist forces.

## Footnotes

[1] This Committee was founded on 30 June 2011, mainly by nationalist parties (Nasserite and Baathist), the parties of the "Rally of the Marxist Left", some Kurdish parties who withdrew quickly (with the exception of the PYD, a Syrian Kurdish party affiliated with the PKK in Turkey) and independent personalities. On September 11, 2012 a number of cadres of the Committee announced their break with it because of its centrist policy. On September 14, 2012, the Maan movement (a radical democratic movement created on June 23, 2011) announced its break with the Committee while on September 18, the Commission of Syrian Communists also announced that it was leaving the Committee

[2] Since February 2012 defectors from the Committee and others (among them Michel Kilo, Fayez Sara, Hazme Nahar and Samir Aita) have created a new organization called the Syrian Democratic Forum. It held its first meeting in Cairo between April 13 and 16 and is "a space for dialogue, discussion, a gateway uniting the opposition for a conciliatory action"

[3] founded on February 13, 2012 by 14 democratic and radical left groups

[4] Founded in 2004 by five surviving groups of the former radical left, including the Communist Action Party, but with a reformist program

[5] A group of revolutionary Marxist activists involved in the revolutionary process. They were formed in October 2011 and have a monthly publication "Amami"

[6] The Congress was eventually held on September 23 with few participants - its final declaration called the fall of the regime and an international conference to prepare for the transition period

# Sanctions or Collective Punishment?

29 October 2012, by [Maryam Gilani](#)

The new EU sanctions, combined with intensifying US sanctions against the Central Bank of Iran and foreign financial institutions working with it, have already worsened the living conditions of the ordinary Iranian citizens who suffer as a result of the sanctions. The value of the Rial has been halved, inflation has increased dramatically and the purchasing power of the Iranians has diminished. Food prices, particularly for fruit, sugar, meat and poultry, have skyrocketed. Iranians are now forced to wait in long queues, as they did in the war years 30 years ago, to buy subsidized chicken.

Propagandized as an alternative to war and the only non-military measure available to stop Iran's nuclear program and authoritarian regime, the sanctions against Iran prove once again that sanctions are nothing but a form of collective punishment against innocent citizens. Sanctions are not a newly-discovered remedy for taming authoritarian regimes that are unpopular with the US and its western allies. Prior to the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003, Iraqi citizens suffered terribly under thirteen years of US-

backed sanctions that denied millions of Iraqis of access to clean water, medicine and vital technologies. According to the World Health Organization, in just the first four years of sanctions, the child mortality rate in Iraq increased 500%. Blocking international trade and access to finance does not damage the existence of the Iranian regime as much as it devastates the day-to-day living conditions of ordinary people. The black market as a rule owes its existence to the restrictions on the legal market and it is highly controlled by political elites.

Sanctions have not only affected the lives of Iranians living in Iran. They have also been subject to 'unique' interpretations that have affected Iranians living abroad. In the US state of Georgia, for instance, Persian-speaking clients were refused service at an Apple computer store. In the Netherlands, the Foreign Minister announced - before the EU sanctions had even gone into effect - that the Dutch government would not renew the resident permits of Iranian researchers and specialists working in Dutch universities and research institutes. After protests, both from

within and outside the Netherlands, this policy was revised to only apply to researchers working in the petroleum, natural gas and petrochemical industries in an attempt to keep "certain knowledge" from being transferred back to Iran. However, the boundaries of this "certain knowledge" is kept loose and researchers working in other technological realms are forced to prove their exemption from the law on a case-by-case basis.

Sanctions are often presented as an alternative to war and an effective means to bring authoritarian regimes into compliance with international demands. The history of sanctions, however, proves otherwise. Sanctions are not only often a prelude to war but are themselves a form of warfare perpetrated not against the governing elites but against ordinary people. The people of Iran have been struggling against their regime from the time of its founding. Destroying their basic living conditions and blocking their access to information, communication and technology will only strengthen the regime that they are struggling against.

## The government is preparing a massive political trial against the opposition. We need your solidarity!

27 October 2012, by [Russian Socialist Movement \(RSD\)](#)

In Russia, the first half of October was marked by a tightening of repression against the opposition. For the moment, 19 people have been accused in the affair of the so-called "massive disturbances of public order" on May 6 [1]; most of them are at present in jail.

While arbitrary arrests of participants in the spring actions continue, it is

already clear that a massive political trial against leaders of the opposition is being prepared. On October 5, one of the main Russian television channels, NTV, broadcast a film produced in the style "documentary investigation", containing unprecedented accusations against the opposition, especially against the best known figure of the left opposition, Sergei Udaltsov. In this

propaganda film, done in the purest tradition of Joseph Goebbels, we learn that Udaltsov maintains links with foreign intelligence services and that the main activity of the Left Front which he heads is to scheme with external enemies of the country. As evidence, the film reproduced the recording of a conversation between Sergei Udaltsov, the Left Front activist Leonid Razvojaev, Russian

Socialist Movement member Konstantin Lebedev and one of the closest advisors of the president of Georgia, Guivi Targamadze. The conversation particularly evokes a transfer of money from Georgia, in order to "destabilize" Russia. Although the faces are barely visible on the recording and the sound has been recorded and put on the video separately, barely two days later it was a pretext for a criminal action brought by the Investigating Committee of the Prosecutor's Office of the Federation - the body that is today taking the leading role in organizing the repression.

On 17 October, our comrade Konstantin Lebedev was arrested and Sergei Udaltsov was released after interrogation, subject to signing an undertaking not to leave the territory of Moscow. As for the third participant in "the case", Leonid Razvojaev, he applied for political asylum in Ukraine but was kidnapped in the centre of Kiev by employees of the Russian secret services. It should be noted that the Prosecutor's Office, although acting under the guise of a spy

conspiracy, finally accused three individuals of "massive public order disturbances". The aim is to launch a potentially major trial, in which several cases will be treated together and all the activity of the movement's challenge to the regime will appear as a giant conspiracy.

It is important to note also that both the accused in the case of "espionage" and the majority of those arrested for their participation in "public order disturbances" on May 6 belong to different fractions of the left. On the eve of the implementation of new austerity measures in Russia, attacks against workers' rights and the pension reform, what frightens the Putin-Medvedev duo is the possibility of seeing the democratic movement that already exists unite with the elements of social protest.

The wave of repression that we are witnessing today is a stress test for the protest movement: either we will hold firm, or we will have to go through a new period of apathy and fear. Facing this unprecedented police pressure, we need the solidarity of our comrades in Europe and around the

world. We ask for the organization of pickets for the immediate release of Konstantin Lebedev, the stopping of the criminal action against Sergei Udaltsov and Leonid Razvojaev and the release of political prisoners who took part in the protest on May 6 in Moscow. ?

*The Russian Socialist movement was founded in March 2011 by two organizations, the Socialist Movement Vperiod ("Forward"), Russian section of the Fourth International, and Socialist Resistance. It is part of the Left Front, an alliance formed during the protests against the falsification of the elections in 2011 and 2012.*

## Footnotes

[1] On Sunday May 6, 2012, Moscow, there was a demonstration of tens of thousands of people from the opposition against the nomination of Putin. Police beat protesters and made 400 arrests, including the leader of the Left Front, Sergei Udaltsov.

# "The Greek people are currently at the epicenter of the capitalist crisis."

27 October 2012, by [Éric Toussaint](#)

"We are now experiencing one of the worst crises of the worldwide capitalist system. But capitalism will not die a peaceful, natural death. Crises are part of the metabolism of capitalism. Only conscious action by the people can destroy and supersede capitalism in order to open the way to democratic socialism.

The Greek people are currently at the epicenter of the capitalist crisis. The way in which the Greek people mobilize to confront and respond to this capitalist crisis will be a crucial factor for finding a solution at the international level. You are at the epicenter of both the crisis and the solution to this crisis.

Seven years ago, the epicenter of the

alternative to capitalism was located in South America: in Venezuela, in Ecuador, in Bolivia, when Hugo Chávez said in 2005 that he no longer believed in a third way; that he felt that there must be a worldwide socialism of the 21st century. Today, the epicenter of the alternatives - which have still not taken shape, as the title of this conference clearly indicates - has moved to Europe.

What the people of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia have shown the world is that it is entirely possible to resist the capitalist offensive, that it is entirely possible to apply a policy of redistribution of wealth, to socialize the major strategic corporations; that it is absolutely possible and necessary

that we take back control over common property such as natural resources. They have done it, and they are still in power in government; and let us hope that tomorrow, on 7 October in the presidential elections, Hugo Chávez will again be re-elected president of Venezuela.

We are living at a historic time in Europe today. Never at any time in the past 65 years have we experienced an offensive as brutal as the one we face today in the countries of Europe. Everywhere in Europe, the pretext of debt is being used - not only in Greece, but in all European countries - to apply policies of budgetary austerity. In Greece, we can clearly see the results in their most brutal

expression, but Greece is only the start of an offensive that is already affecting the people of Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and other European countries as well.

That is why we must fight back and unify our efforts to suspend payment of, and repudiate, illegitimate debt. This is a fundamental goal for all of us on the entire continent.

The Greek people have taught Europe a great lesson in the past three years. First, they are resisting; they have organized and taken part in at least 14 general strikes. But, just as fundamental, and despite the electoral defeat, is the fact that the Greek people nonetheless voted massively for the radical initiative proposed by SYRIZA. It is a fundamental lesson for the rest of Europe - where too often the Left is far too timid. Greece's example shows the strength of a united Left, a Left that brings people together, that has created a coalition of 12 different political organizations and is endeavoring to unify them in SYRIZA. Greece's example shows that when a party or a coalition says "No", when it says: "If we are elected to govern, we will disobey the Troika", that courageous and combative attitude can win the support of the people. It is a lesson to all of us.

The reduction of the Greek debt in March 2012 is a swindle, and it is a trap. It is very important to show international public opinion that the debt for which the Troika is demanding payment, which now represents 150 billion euros - that is Greece's debt with the Troika: 150 billion euros - to show that that entire debt is an illegitimate debt which must

be annulled by the action of the people, through the disobedience of a government of the people.

They are trying to convince you that suspending payment will result in chaos in the country. But in the past 10 years, three examples totally contradict the idea that there is no possible salvation outside of debt repayment. Argentina suspended payment of its debt in December 2001, a debt of 90 billion dollars, and Argentina has experienced economic growth of 4 to 7% each year since 2003. Ecuador suspended payment of its commercial debt between November 2008 and June 2009 and succeeded in imposing a 65% reduction of the debt on its creditors. And Ecuador is doing very well economically.

Iceland, that model of neoliberalism, experienced grave difficulties in September 2008 with the collapse of its entire banking system. Iceland has refused, and still refuses, to repay the debt of its banks to the UK and Holland. Iceland is now doing very well, with an annual economic growth of 3%.

Clearly, Greece is not Iceland, nor is she Argentina or Ecuador. There are real differences, but the lesson to be learned is this: Here or elsewhere, and under circumstances that can differ greatly, if governments who have won popular support decide to suspend payment of illegitimate debt, they can achieve an improvement in living conditions for their people. It is an example that should be followed.

Clearly, cancellation of the debt is necessary, but not sufficient. Cancelling Greece's debt without

changing the rest of the economy and the unjust social and economic model will not enable Greece to build an alternative that will be in the interest of her people. The cancellation, the suspension of payment of the debt is necessary, but socialization of the banking system, a change in the tax system so that the wealthy pay more taxes and taxes on goods and services of first necessity are reduced, are also an absolutely necessary part of an alternative model.

My dear friends, history is not written in advance. Several scenarios remain open to us. We can continue within the current chaotic situation, with more and more authoritarianism on the part of governments who are at the service of the banks. This can continue for years. Another scenario is possible, and is even worse - an authoritarian, neo-Fascist scenario. That is a grave danger and a very present threat. But there are two other scenarios: under popular pressure, there can be a regulated capitalism, a capitalism of the type that was practiced in the 1950s and 1960s, a capitalism of the Keynesian type. That is a possible solution. But the fact that there are so many of us gathered here this evening shows that we feel that there is no point in limiting our struggle to an attempt to discipline capitalism. We want to go beyond capitalism. We want a democratic, self-managed socialism of the 21st century. Long live international socialism. Long live self-managed socialism. Long live SYRIZA. Long live the Greek people. Long live popular resistance. Long live the revolution, comrades!"

*Translation: "Snake" Arbusto and Judith Harris*

## President promulgates law decriminalizing abortion

27 October 2012, by [Guillermo C. Cohen-DeGovia](#)

The Uruguayan President, José Mujica, promulgated this Monday an act adopted by the national parliament on October 17, 2012, which decriminalizes abortion up to the 12th

week of pregnancy, by decision of the woman, provided that is carried out under the supervision of the state.

The draft had been voted for by the

Senate and the Chamber of Representatives (MPS). The President ratified the initiative, unlike his predecessor, Tabare Vasquez, who vetoed the bill.

The EFE agency explained that the new legal standard does not technically “legalize” abortion, but decriminalizes it, provided that certain procedures regulated by the state are complied with.

During the first 12 weeks, women must go to a medical consultation to discuss the circumstances and conditions ensuing from the conception, which include “situations of economic, social or family hardship or age”.

Then, the doctor will take the case to an interdisciplinary team composed of psychologists,

gynaecologists and social workers, who will inform the women on the “risks” of abortion and the alternatives to this decision, such as “social and economic support programs”, or “the possibility of giving your child up for adoption”.

Women will have a period of five days of reflection before the abortion if that is their final choice. Abortions may be carried out at any public or private health centre in the country or, failing that, the centre must ensure that this is carried out by third parties, in cases of conscientious objection. Abortions that are carried out outside this procedure will continue to be illegal

and therefore penalized.

For the law to come into effect, the Parliament and the authorities of the Ministry of Public Health will have to implement a regulation, which should be ready within a month.

The head of state explained that decriminalization was “very much more intelligent than a ban”. Turning to sectors of society who reject the measure, he said that “from the point of view of principle it can be reprehensible, but from the point of view of historical practice, of what has happened, I think that many more lives are saved.”

## Women are the real creditors of the public debt

24 October 2012, by [Christine Vanden Daelen](#)

Just as structural adjustment plans have exhausted and impoverished women in the global South, austerity will bleed the women of Europe dry. The same mechanisms, arising from same neoliberal ideology, are now everywhere at work. The privatisation, liberalisation and budget constraints that are on the menu of the austerity measures are eating away at the social rights of women, accentuating their poverty, hardening and exacerbating gender inequalities and undermining feminist gains. There is no doubt that the countless socio-economic regressions that are being tested on them today so that the capitalists do not have to pay for the crisis they have caused, will be tomorrow inflicted on all the popular classes, women and men.

### A European overview of the social regression that is being imposed on women

### in the name of the debt

Among the main measures concocted for the governments of Europe, placed under the guardianship or the strong influence of the IMF and of European institutions, are: a widespread decline of wages and pensions, breaking down social protection, the destruction of public services, attacks on labour laws and the increase of taxation on consumption. At the end of the day, all these policies run counter to the emancipation of women in Europe.

### I. A decrease in income from waged work for women

Well before the recession, the situation of women on the labour market was already far from egalitarian (compared to men). Female employment is characterized by strong gender segregation by type of activity, wage differentials, a high level of part-time work and

concentration in the sectors of the economy that are less well remunerated, undervalued, least protected by social security and tend to be casual. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that women are in a less advantageous position to face the crisis.

Several factors, directly related to the debt crisis and the macro-economic measures that are associated with it, exert pressure on income from women’s waged work:

*1. The rate of women’s unemployment is increasing*

If, in its first phase, the crisis severely affected sectors with a predominantly male workforce (for example, banking, the building industry, the car industry and transport), the sectors where women are in the majority (for example, services to people and businesses - catering, cleaning, etc. - sectors funded by the public authorities, as well as retail distribution and commerce) are at present directly and strongly affected. This gender-differentiated impact of the crisis on the employment of women and men is indicative of the widespread character of occupational segmentation (already underlined

above).

Women's job losses are mainly due to the non-renewal of fixed-term contracts, the loss of purchasing power by consumers and users of services, and cuts in public finances imposed by austerity measures. Since women are, in Europe, very dominant in public services (they represent no less than two-thirds of those employed in the sectors of education, health and welfare), the financial restrictions demanded of governments affect them disproportionately. A considerable number of women are losing their jobs and seeing their already restricted incomes fall still further. Now, since we know that, today as yesterday, it is women who bear most of the cost of food, health and education for the family, we can measure how much this decline in their purchasing power will affect children and dependants, but also the poorest women, who tend to put the needs of the family before their own. This has a direct impact on their physical and moral health: they eat less and/or less well, they neglect to take palliative and preventative health care, not to mention their deprivation on the level of cultural and social events, and of reading... This slide toward insecurity often leads them to seek a second or even a third job and to have recourse to credit to be able to ensure the needs of their families and their survival. It is no coincidence that micro-credit is growing in Europe, with as its favourite target women and their "consumerist cravings"!

If the losses of women's jobs are less sudden, less spectacular and therefore less visible than those that men have experienced and are still facing, they are certainly not less painful. In fact, the consequences of unemployment are more tragic for women in the long term. Insofar as they have on average less valued work experience than men, and as their careers are often based on part-time jobs with temporary contracts and periods of interruption, women are more vulnerable on the labour market and therefore have more difficulty in finding a job.

In addition, surveys show that women are more likely to be laid off when jobs are scarce, because men are still considered legitimate breadwinners. A

study on the global level in 2005 [1] revealed that almost 40 per cent of respondents felt that, in a situation like that, men had more right to employment than women. But the right of women to work is a constitutional right in many European countries, starting with Belgium.

Finally, women migrant workers employed as domestic servants or in looking after children suffer the full impact of the decline in the purchasing power of their "employers". Because the latter are less and less able to pay for their services, they are compelled to dismiss them. Although the jobs of women migrant workers are not in a big majority of cases synonymous with decent work, and they accentuate the differences between women, the economic immigration of these women allows them to compensate for the poverty that ravages their families in their countries of origin.

In conclusion, let us take note that while the effects of the debt crisis on women's employment are catastrophic, it is very likely that they are being underestimated. The reality is much worse than official reports suggest. In fact, people working part time are excluded from the unemployment figures. In Europe, in 2007, 31.2 per cent [2] of women were working part-time (four times more than men). We can say without any doubt that that fact that women start to work part time is rarely the result of a personal choice and is one of the direct consequences of the crisis...

#### *Some examples of female unemployment in Europe resulting from the debt crisis:*

In the Czech Republic [3], unemployment especially concerns mothers returning from maternity leave, mothers with young children in general, women over 50 and migrant women, while in a town in the North of Portugal, out of 17,000 inhabitants, 6,000 women are unemployed [4]!

In Poland, the mostly female textile industry found itself in crisis when the main sectors that it supplied in Western Europe collapsed: 40,000 jobs were lost [5].

#### *2. The wages and pensions of women*

#### *workers are being reduced*

One of the main variables of adjustment consists of reducing the wages and the working time of workers in the public sector, composed mainly of women. Wages are frozen [6] or reduced (in Estonia, between 2008 and 2010, wages in the civil service were reduced by 15 per cent [7]), pensions are cut (in Ireland, a 7.5 per cent tax is imposed on pensions [8]), workers' benefits such as bonuses or complementary payments like the 13th or 14th month are undermined, many full time positions are converted to part time, the use of leave without pay is widespread (in Romania, workers were forced to take two weeks of unpaid leave in 2009 [9]),... In Belgium, women working as domestic helpers or in office cleaning, in both the private and public sectors, while they already often work part-time, have seen their working time decrease even further [10].

These lost wages often force women to have more than one job or to alternate, as in England, their working time with their partners: while one works during the day, the others work the night shift to avoid having to allocate a portion of their revenues to have their children looked after...

The present precarious situation of retired women is being accentuated. More and more women will experience the hell of old-age poverty, whereas they have worked all their life. Not only is the level of pensions decreasing, but the retirement age for women will be raised, as in Austria where in 2014, women, instead of stopping work at 57 will have to wait until they are 60, while in Italy they will have to keep going until they are 65 years from January 1, 2012 [11]!

Let us note that in France, particularly because of the widespread use of part-time work (and when you say part-time work, you can say partial pension!), women's pensions are 40 per cent lower than those of men, while in Poland, women receive a pension that is lower than the minimum wage, which is already extremely low.

The decrease in wages and pensions amplifies the wage gap between

women and men. At present, for equal work and equal responsibilities, European women earn on average 18 per cent less than their male colleagues. In some countries, such as Estonia, the wage gap is as much as 30 per cent [12]. In Belgium, it is currently 21 per cent [13].

### *3. The debt crisis accentuates the phenomenon of precarisation of female employment in Europe*

The fall in household income engendered by the recession is pushing working-class people to accept jobs that are well below their professional and educational qualifications, most often implying a worsening of conditions (working during breaks, night work, hours cut and changed, travel time not taken into account - for example in the service sector). This is particularly true for women (and more specifically for mothers) who have more difficulties than men in accepting jobs that do not allow them to reconcile work and family responsibilities (e.g. work that is far from their homes, not easily accessible or whose schedules are not compatible with those of school and extra-curricular structures).

So, today even more than yesterday, women predominate in precarious jobs (part-time jobs, limited-term contracts, temporary or even casual work) [14]. Not only is it precisely these jobs that are the first to go when there are layoffs, but in addition they provide the women workers concerned with little or no access to the protection offered by labour legislation and social security. Often, precarious workers are deprived of conditions relating to protection during pregnancy and maternity leave, as well as the other main forms of social protection.

The deterioration of the working conditions of women highlights the precariousness of female employment. Pressure on and worsening of working conditions, intensification of the workload (attempts to abolish or reduce breaks, downsizing,...), increased flexibilisation of working schedules, which intensifies fear and stress due to the difficulty of knowing when you will be working, of being able to reconcile work and private life, a demand for polyvalence not

accompanied by any training...All this leads to a real exhaustion at work that is not without consequences for women's health.

In the whole of Europe, the debt crisis is really in fact synonymous with the financial, physical and psychological precarisation of women's work, with an increase in the level of their poverty (a growing number of women workers have income below the poverty threshold) and loss of financial autonomy, a fundamental element of any real emancipation of women.

## **II. The demolition of social protection**

A large part of the cuts imposed in the public sector in the name of the debt come from cuts in social benefits. But neither government revenues and public spending are gender-neutral: while men, because of their higher salaries, tend to be the main contributors to the tax revenue of the state, women have, for their part, tended to be the main "beneficiaries" of public spending through social services which are also gender-determined: childcare, care for dependent persons, public management of housing, education, health...

Therefore, reductions in public resources for social protection are much more likely to have a direct effect on women.

This observation is especially glaring in two areas:

### *1. The austerity measures block the family policies of governments*

Reduction or outright abolition of certain social benefits which specifically affect women, especially mothers and among them, mothers who are "heads of families".

As an illustration, here are some measures that everywhere in Europe hinder any process of promoting equality of the sexes:

The Romanian government has reduced family allowances and those for maternity leave, as well as

allowances for single-parent families (more than 90 per cent of these families are composed of a single woman and her children) and assistance to people with disabilities [15].

In the Czech Republic, social benefits paid to families with low incomes (and which are therefore often single-parent) have been abolished, the level of the allowance for parental leave has been reduced and conditions of access to it have been made more stringent. Allowances for new-born babies have also been reduced, as have been those concerning home care [16];

In England, the good health benefit during pregnancy, family allowances and tax credits related to the birth of a child have all been restricted or frozen. Other reductions in social benefits, such as housing aid, affect women disproportionately. In fact, more women than men depend on these benefits. A study commissioned by the British TUC (Trades Union Congress) finds that following on all these measures, single mothers will lose no less than 18 per cent of their net income [17].

In addition, although women are often disadvantaged in terms of access to and level of unemployment benefit (in Germany, in 2010, out of 47 per cent of women who are unemployed, only 28% per cent receive unemployment benefits [18]) [19]; austerity policies envisage even further cuts.

Some countries have made their criteria for eligibility to social allowances even stricter, while others like Ireland reduce the level (by 4 per cent [20]) or even shorten the duration of benefits (Denmark has reduced by half - from four to two years - the duration of unemployment benefits [21]). In Belgium, a note by Elio Di Rupo, charged with forming a government, envisages unemployment benefits being progressively decreased even more than at present, the end of lifelong benefits and a hardening of the Policy of Support to the Unemployed [22].

All these examples show to what extent the austerity measures resulting from the "debt system" are contrary to any objective of the emancipation of women: not only do they undermine their financial autonomy, as well as any possibility of better reconciling the different

aspects of their life - through, among other things, the use of public services - but furthermore, they want them to mainly pay the price for the crisis.

## *2. Austerity policies undermine programmes instituting equality between the sexes*

### *Gender-equality policies*

While measures to promote equality between the sexes should not be a "luxury" reserved only for periods of economic growth, it can be seen very clearly that the debt crisis is leading to a decrease both in the attention paid to the question by politicians and in financing for mechanisms of equality, as well as in the practical implementation of legislation. In Spain, the Department for Gender Equality has been purely and simply abolished, while in Italy, the family policy budget has been reduced by 70 per cent [23]. But the importance of the existence of such policies is particularly glaring in times of recession.

Because of the austerity measures, services providing care for children and dependants are becoming less and less affordable, adequate, accessible and their quality is deteriorating. However, good care services are the guarantee for women to have a better balance between professional and private life, between productive and reproductive work, facilitating their participation in the labour market and encouraging gender equality.

In addition, quality public services play a positive role in the development of children.

In Bulgaria, the number of structures for the welcome and protection of children has been reduced; in Estonia, their hours have been reduced, preventing women from coordinating child care with their work schedules, while in Ireland, the price per child has been increased. In Dublin, it varies between €800 and €1000 per month! [24]

This decline of care services has already forced European women either to reduce their hours of paid work and therefore to switch to part-time work, or to abandon outright the job market. So in Europe, the rate of employment of women has fallen by

12.4 per cent when they have children (these figures are from 2009 - at the present time, the situation must be even worse) [25].

We can see to what extent austerity measures are endangering the achievements of feminist struggles and reinforce existing stereotypes of men as breadwinners and women as housewives.

### *The non-profit sector*

Associations which provide help for women, such as family planning, homes for battered, raped and ill-treated women, telephone lines serving to listen to and help women who are in crisis situations, shelters for women and children, are also directly in the eye of the cyclone of the budget cuts imposed in the name of the debt.

Everywhere in Europe, whereas they have contributed to significant changes in favour of women and, indirectly, to the wellbeing of society in general, these associations are facing a reduction of their subsidies, both public and private. Indeed, under the effect of the economic downturn, private donors are contributing less and less in the spheres of solidarity.

Thus, although the crisis is synonymous with a feminization of poverty and an increase in the precariousness of women's existence, on the financial, psychological and physical levels (figures attest that domestic violence has increased with the crisis). Women's associations - which could offer them support and prospects - have become less accessible and will have to reduce the quantity and quality of the services they are able to provide to women.

The rest of the socio-cultural sector is also feeling the effects of austerity measures. Now, because it works primarily with impoverished populations, this sector brings assistance and support in priority to women. There is no mystery: if it decreases food aid, emergency shelter, permanent education workshops, cultural activities, women are the first to be deprived of these services

In conclusion, we can safely say that

debt is leading to the deterioration, in a downward spiral, of all the policies and processes leading to the emancipation of women in Europe.

## **III. The destruction of public services**

This affects women in the first instance and in three ways. Why?

Since they are a majority in the civil service [26], women are the first victims of the policies of mass lay-offs imposed by austerity plans. England intends to abolish 500,000 jobs by 2015, Romania already destroyed 100,000 in 2010 and France intends to eliminate 31,000 this year [27];

Women are also the primary beneficiaries of public services, whose existence is crucial for their participation in the labour market and for their economic autonomy. In fact, quality collective facilities and services, in sufficient number and financially accessible, are essential levers of their emancipation.

Finally, it is women who will have to, through an increase in their unpaid and invisible work, take responsibility for care and education tasks abandoned by public services. So we are seeing a real substitution of roles and responsibilities, from the state to the private sector, and therefore to women, preventing them from fully participating in all spheres of life. In the name of the public debt, a transition is thus taking place: from the concept of "social state" we move on to that of "social mother". And all this is done for free, so as to reduce spending and repay the bankers: isn't the crisis wonderful?

### *Cuts in the health care system*

The attacks against European health systems are structuring policies of austerity. Women are the first affected by these budget restrictions for three reasons:

As we have seen, women make up the bulk of the workforce in the health sector and are thus disproportionately affected by the job losses that are taking place there. Furthermore, they occupy positions that are less well paid and valued: there has been a precarisation of contracts and working conditions (e.g. fewer nursing

auxiliaries are now being taken on a full-time basis and with permanent contracts, and more for short periods and for working part time).

Although the sexual and reproductive health of women enables them to exercise control over their own bodies and therefore, over their life, the austerity measures intend to reduce the necessary funding. But this specific sector of public health is absolutely fundamental for the effective promotion of gender equality. Fewer public subsidies are allocated to the prevention of HIV, to abortions, to family planning, to pre- and post-natal health services and to preventive health care for women;

The closing of health centres - such as has occurred in Bulgaria: since September 2009, 21 hospitals have been closed, mainly in small towns and villages [28] - increases the share of care work and reproductive health care that falls to women.

#### *Cuts in education*

The budgetary restrictions practised in the field of education have an impact primarily on women as the majority of workers in this sector; they are, as in the field of health, the first affected by job losses (in Bulgaria no less than 50 schools have been closed, and in Latvia and in Greece school closures are becoming more widespread) and their working conditions are deteriorating (in Estonia, the number of pupils per teacher has already increased) [29]. In France, they are closing public and free pre-schools for children from the age of two in favour of "gardens of awakening" which are private and for which parents have to pay. This results in job losses in the public sector and increases the cost of child care.

Other austerity measures, such as the reduction of allocations for the purchase of books and school material (as in Estonia) or the decrease in grants for meals at nursery and primary school (two-thirds reduction in Hungary) increase the costs related to the education of children, which usually fall on their mothers [30].

*The privatization of social services to the person*

This is accentuated by austerity policies. The deficiencies in these services are compensated for by each woman individually but also and especially by migrant women without papers. These women, often undeclared and therefore without access to protection and to social and professional benefits, are highly exposed to working conditions which border on forced labour as well as to sexist and/or racist violence.

#### **IV. Attacks on labour legislation**

The austerity policies that governments want to impose, with the support of the IMF and European institutions, have as their objective a strong deregulation of the labour market that is synonymous with the dismantling of labour legislation and with a disintegration of the right to organise... Gradually, the precarious work of women is more the norm than the exception. In the name of the repayment of the public debt in Europe, women are working more to earn less.

#### *Flexible, precarious and casual work*

Some employers, faced with a decline in profits resulting from the recession, are tempted to take the crisis as a pretext to further exploit women. Because of their low position in the labour market and, therefore, reduced bargaining power, women accept "more easily" than men conditions of precarious work, with a reduced salary and without social security. In order not to hire new personnel, managements flexibilise women's work schedules and do not renew their short-term contracts. To minimize social contributions and to avoid payment of taxes and other costs associated with regular employment, some employers do not hesitate to encourage women's casual work.

#### *Increase in illegal procedures against women*

In order to "save" money, some employers restrict policies and initiatives that favour women, or even adopt outright illegal practices such as the dismissal of pregnant women. The fact that gender equality no longer appears as a priority for governments of course accentuates

this trend.

Although women have always been faced with the risk of losing their jobs when they are pregnant or after maternity leave, this risk is much higher in times of recession. Thus in England, the Equal Opportunity Commission recognizes that while the number of dismissals of pregnant women is 30,000 per year (2009 figures), this phenomenon will continue to increase with the [31] debt crisis.

This shocking consequence of austerity is not only immoral and profoundly contradictory to equality in the workplace, it is also illegal.

#### **V. Increase in taxation on consumption - VAT**

Austerity measures do not pressurize the rich and businesses, but the popular classes. The increase in VAT on items of current consumption (food, goods and services) perfectly illustrates this reality. It particularly disadvantages women who provide for basic needs and food for the family and creates growing poverty in households. In England, VAT will be increased from 17.5 to 20 per cent [32]!

#### *General grinding-down of women*

Not only will austerity plans in no way deal with the real causes of the crisis, but they are plunging millions of human beings into misery and poverty. And women are at the forefront, undermined by the psychological impact of increasing poverty, ground down by overwork and by the stress brought on by being forced to take on multiple roles.

As we have seen, debt and austerity are not neutral from the point of view of gender. On the contrary, they are the cause of a feminization of poverty, of a precarisation of female employment, of a considerable increase in the burden of free labour provided by women to absorb their devastating effects; and in addition, they are destroying the achievements of feminism... However, while they bear the worst consequences of the crisis, women do not owe any debt, of any kind. They are the real creditors at the national and international level. A huge social debt is owed to them.

Without their free work of production, reproduction and care, our societies would simply be in danger of collapsing!

### *The feminist alternatives to debt*

All the forms of social regression imposed on women in the name of the "debt system" demonstrate how any real emancipatory process involves fighting against this debt, which together with patriarchy enslaves women and prevents them from enjoying their most fundamental rights.

All over the world, women's movements are working to strengthen the convergences between them. At the beginning of 2011 there was established, in Greece, the initiative "Women on the move against the debt and the austerity measures" [33]. This network which is being built hopes to contribute to the creation in Europe of a political space for reflection and coordinated action by women against the "debt system" and for the development of feminist alternatives to logic of financial capitalism, a logic which is deadly for human beings. It intends to take part, as a feminist initiative, in the European movement against the debt and the austerity measures and intervenes in various meetings and mobilizations whose focal point is the debt (for example the European Conferences against debt and austerity in Athens on 6 and 7 April 2011 [34], in Brussels on 31 May [35] and in London on October 1st, 2011 [Speech by Sonia Mitralias at the London Conference against Austerity organized by the Coalition of Resistance (October 1, 2011), October 10, 2011, <http://www.cadtm.org/Discours-de-So...>). The initiative thus intends to promote a European feminist campaign that will help to make the "debt system" crumble, this system which is the enemy of any real emancipation of women and of all the peoples of Europe. Wherever debt audit processes are being organized (France, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain), the initiative "Women on the move against the debt and the austerity measures" has the objective of preparing the feminist movement, so that it can support and participate actively in them. It thus reflects the

determination of feminists to fight against a debt that is entirely subordinate to financial interests and to contribute to the development of a new mode of production and distribution of wealth, freed from capitalism and patriarchy.

*First published in French on November 18, 2011 on the site of the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt: <http://www.cadtm.org>*

## Footnotes

[1] European Women's Lobby, *Women, the Financial and Economic Crisis - the Urgency of a Gender Perspective*, September 2009, <http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?hp?..>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Oxfam International/ European Women's Lobby, *Women's poverty and social exclusion in the European Union at a time of recession - An Invisible Crisis?*, March 2010, p.15, <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/p...>

[4] Trades Union Congress, *Bearing the brunt, leading the response - Women and the global economic crisis*, March 2011, London, p.7, [http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/TUC\\_Gl...](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/TUC_Gl...)

[5] Ewa Charkiewicz, *The Impact of the Crisis on Women in Eastern Europe* Awid, March 2010, p. 8-9, <http://www.awid.org/Library/2010-Updates-Impacts-of-the-Crisis-on-Women-s-Rights-Sub-regional-perspectives>

[6] Under the pressure of the debt crisis, all over Europe the automatic indexation of wages in line with the cost of living, which especially benefits low-paid workers, is under attack.

[7] European TUC, *4th Annual 8*

*March Survey, 2011- Section III. The impact of the economic crisis on female employment*, March 2001, p. 18, [http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/8\\_March11\\_analysis\\_FINAL\\_EN.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/8_March11_analysis_FINAL_EN.pdf)

[8] Ibid

[9] European TUC, op. cit., p. 19.

[10] Confédération des syndicats chrétiens - CSC, *Femmes Vs Crise*, p. 3-5, <http://www.world-psi.org/Template/EN...>

[11] D. Millet, E. Toussaint (eds.), *La dette ou la vie*, CADTM/Ed. Aden, June 2011, Brussels, p.343-358.

[12] European Women's Lobby, *Women, the Financial and Economic Crisis - the Urgency of a Gender Perspective*, op.cit.

[13] Confédération des syndicats chrétiens - CSC, *Femmes Vs Crise*, op. cit., p. 17.

[14] In Western Europe, between a quarter and a third of the workforce are at present employed in temporary and/or part-time work, in particular in the United Kingdom, in the Netherlands, in Spain and in Italy. [W. Harcourt, L. Woestman, *The Impact of the Deepening Economic Crisis on Women and Gender Equality in Western Europe* Awid, March 2010, p. 8-9.

[15] European TUC, op. cit., p. 12

[16] Ibid.

[17] op. cit., p. 13

[18] M. Jespen, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), *Aspects contemporains de la crise au féminine*, intervention during the seminar "Le nerf de la guerre...des sexes. Rapports sociaux et argent" organized by L'Université des femmes, Brussels, 16 December 2010.

[19] The systems of social protection continue to be built around the concept of uninterrupted employment in the course of a working life of between 40 and 45 years, which rarely corresponds to the cycle of women's working lives.

[20] Oxfam International/ European Women's Lobby, op. cit., p. 31

[21] M. Jespen, op. cit.

[22] Collectif Solidarité contre l'Exclusion, "Un gouvernement anti-chômeur", n°72 of the quarterly *Ensemble pour la solidarité, contre l'exclusion*, October 2011, p. 18-47 and article published in *Le Soir*, October 26, 2011, "Saigner les chômeurs pour soigner les banquiers ? Inacceptable !", <http://www.netevents.be/ExternalL in...>

[23] D. Millet, E. Toussaint (eds.) op. cit., p343-358.

[24] Oxfam International/ European Women's Lobby, op. cit.,

p 25

[25] W. Harcourt, op. cit, p 10.

[26] In Europe, women represent 78 per cent of the workforce in social and health services and 60 per cent of primary and secondary school teachers. See Oxfam International/ European Women's Lobby, op. cit., p 24-25

[27] [27] D. Millet, E. Toussaint (eds.), op. cit., p.343-358.

[28] Oxfam International/ European Women's Lobby, op. cit., p25

[29] Ibid.

[30] [30] Oxfam International/ European Women's Lobby, op. cit., p. 6.

[31] H. Philomena, *Les femmes et la crise de la civilization*, July 2009, <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/sp i...>

[32] J. Leschke and M. Jespen, *The*

*economic crisis - Challenge or opportunity for gender equality in social policy outcomes. A comparison of Denmark, Germany and the UK*, ETUI, Brussels, April 2011, p. 53.

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## Bosses' greed kills more than 325 workers

24 October 2012, by [Pierre Rousset](#)

As is often the case, no safety measures had been respected by the bosses for whom only profit counts: windows barred, emergency exits locked, few or no fire extinguishers, doors and stairs blocked by goods, highly flammable products in all corners, packing in of staff and so on. Fires are common in these factories, but no authority cared... until the tragedy.

For Nasir Mansoor, Secretary-General of Pakistan's National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), in Pakistan "workers are treated more like slaves than human beings" [1]. During a street demonstration on September 12, the NTUF demanded a strict inspection of plants in coordination

with organizations representing the employees, the registration of all industrial establishments under the Factories Act, the effective implementation of laws on health and safety, the abolition of the contract system, the issuing of a letter of hire to everyone at the time of their hiring and their inclusion in social protection systems [2].

What does the life of a worker matter to the wealthy? As Farooq Tariq, of the Labour Party (LPP) bitterly noted, if members of the elite had died in such a manner, the government would have declared a day of national mourning. Asif Zardari, president of Pakistan and co-chair of the ruling PPP, made a very brief visit to the

Lahore hospital where victims of the fire at the shoe company had been taken, to the plant and to the families. He went after having promised compensation, and had, according to the press, given flowers to five hospitalized workers.

The tragedy has become an excuse for a polemical dispute between the two competing parties of the elite, each accusing the other of negligence: the People's Party (PPP) which governs the province of Punjab (where the shoe factory was located) and the Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif (PLM - N) in Sindh (where the clothing company was located). In truth, in neither province was the inspection of enterprises authorized. Such

inspections had been banned under the Musharaff dictatorship and this prohibition has only been formally lifted in Punjab (not in Sindh) after the death of 27 employees on January 4, 2012, at a pharmaceutical company in Lahore. However, the lifting of the ban did not mean authorization [3].

Charged (how could it be avoided?), the criminal bosses were immediately released on bail. They have sought refuge in Larkana bench, the hometown of the Bhutto family, which heads the PPP and, today, the country. The class injustice is obvious when we know that, for defending the rights of loom workers, trade union leaders in Faisalabad were each sentenced to 99 years in prison under anti-terrorism laws. "Not a single person", notes Farooq Tariq, "has accepted any responsibility of this great tragedy and no minister or adviser or any state bureaucrat has resigned. It shows a complete collapse of morality of the ruling class in Pakistan" [4].

In Pakistan, popular anger is great. Various trade union federations, notably, called for a "black day" on September 15, as well as political parties: the Awami Party of Pakistan (APP), Workers Party (WPP) Pakistan, Pakistan Peoples Party (Shaheed Bhutto PPP). At Lahore, this appeal was launched at a press conference held on September 13 at the Press Club.

On September 15, in the great textile centre of Faisalabad, most businesses

were closed due to strikes. United events, bringing together trade unions and left parties, took place, notably in Islamabad, Lahore, Hyderabad and Karachi.

On the international level the IndustriALL Global Union (IGU) federation and LabourStart immediately organized a protest campaign [5]. They joined Pakistani trade unions demanding wage compensation from the government of five million rupees for the families of the workers who were killed, and two million rupees for injured workers and the maintenance of the wages of the workers. The unions also asked the Government to arrest employers and charge them with murder. They are demanding sanctions against the Ministry of Labour and government authorities who have failed to ensure the safety and health of these workers. A petition is open online to support these demands. [6]

In a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Jyrki Raina, general secretary of the IGU, wrote: "The 2010 Pakistan Labour policy has among its objectives the following: Just and humane conditions of work be guaranteed to all workers. We very much would like to see this be finally applied to the garment and shoe-making workers in Pakistan who constitutes 30 per cent of the workers in the country and who have some of the most inhumane working conditions" [7].

The labour movement and left-wing parties are bringing together their forces so that the guilty employers do not escape justice and safety measures are finally imposed on industrialists. Thus in Karachi - where the most deadly fire took place - a new movement was formed: the Workers Right Movement (WRM). To this end, on September 22 more than 70 representatives of trade union federations, enterprise union sections, territorial agencies operating in the industrial areas, left parties, youth, student, and women's organizations, social workers, and human rights activists, as well as individuals, gathered [8]. A rally was announced for September 29.

It is, obviously, not just in Pakistan that such tragedies occur. On May 10, 1993, Thailand experienced one of its worst industrial fires. It destroyed the Kader toy factory, leaving 188 dead and more than 500 injured, some remaining victims with disabilities for life (some paralyzed) after having jumped out of the second, third and fourth floors of the building. Asian Food Worker, the newsletter of the IUF [9] Asia Pacific, described the working conditions in this company, which recall those of Pakistan: "minimum wages were the norm, overtime was compulsory, work often extended late into the evening and amenities were lacking" [10].

According to this article published on the 18th of July 2007 by the Asia Pacific secretariat of the IUF [