

A Feminist Wave to Change Everything

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The third transnational feminist strike of March 8, 2019 has hopefully dispelled any doubts about the fact that we are now in the middle of a new historic [feminist wave](#) wave. With six million people on strike in Spain, general strikes or work stoppages called by labor organizations in Italy, Argentina, and Chile, mass demonstrations in a number of countries including Turkey and Mexico, and a significant growth of mobilizations in the UK, Belgium, and Germany, this March 8 has demonstrated the expansive dynamic of the new feminist movement. This expansion should be understood through two aspects. One is what Argentina and other Latin American feminist movements have called “[transversality](#),” namely the movement’s ability to spread across society, permeating pre-existing organizations and current struggles, and acting as a catalyst for their unification under an anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist feminist banner. Transversality can also be understood as the process of universalizing the feminist movement, which, beginning from a specific standpoint (that of gender and sexual oppression and of the identities that these generate) articulates a politics of liberation for everybody, or - to quote the slogan of the feminist strike in Spain - a politics that aims to “change everything.” The second aspect is the transnational dissemination of the movement, which this year saw calls for feminist strikes in new countries such as Germany and Belgium, and further spread across Asia and the Middle East.

For this dossier we have asked activists from various countries to detail the organizational and political processes and dynamics that led to the feminist strike in their respective countries. In particular, we have asked them to discuss their organizational forms, their relation to the labor movement in the process of calling for a workplace strike or stoppage, and the significance of the transnational dimension of the movement for their own organizing as well as the challenges looking ahead. This dossier is far from exhaustive, but it provides us with a significant sample of feminist strategies, and aims to join and provide a forum for a transnational conversation among feminist activists involved in the new feminist wave. For this reason, we will continue to update the dossier with further contributions coming from other countries.

The contributions collected here display an array of convergences and differences across various mobilizations. They also reflect the movement’s unevenness across different countries. The United States is among the countries in which the feminist wave has not yet managed to reach a significant mass dimension. However, the immense women’s marches of January 2017, the success of the more modest first international women’s strike the same year, as well as the media impact of #metoo and #timesup all indicate that the potentialities for developing a mass feminist movement were, and probably still are, in place in this country. As [Tithi Bhattacharya](#) has noted the strike wave spreading within the sectors of education, hospitality and healthcare involves social reproductive sectors heavily impacted by the crisis, and suggests the presence of two key factors that characterize the new feminist wave as well as many current social struggles around the globe: a crisis of social reproduction on the one hand and women’s leading role in the fight for our lives on the other. Nonetheless, these factors have failed to coalesce into a broad feminist movement here.

It is difficult to identify the precise reasons for this lack of impact in the United States, but we can indicate some key factors that have played a role. After January 2017, the Women's March became the obvious reference point for the feminist "resistance" to Trump's administration, following the unexpected and unprecedented participation of several hundred thousand people in the various marches across the country. Around 650 marches took place in various localities, with an estimated total participation of four million people, possibly the largest street demonstration in the history of the United States. However, rather than promoting the kind of self-organization and participation from below characteristic of the experiences detailed in this dossier, the Women's March ultimately structured itself as a nonprofit organization. In the words of [Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor](#), "nonprofit organizations [...] rely on funding to pay staffs and organizers, thereby professionalizing their participation in much of the activism they are engaged in." This nonprofit model "ultimately prioritizes the expertise and experience of its professional staff, executive director, and overseeing board over the public it typically only calls upon to attend its actions." The top-down focus of many third sector organizations has detrimental effects on sustained grassroots involvement. Taylor continues:

What is not clear is how and where the people who attend the actions are able to then play an active role in shaping the politics, strategy and tactics of the movements they are called upon to populate but not direct. This approach perceives the public as passive, awaiting marching orders, while the dynamism of movement building is left to a professional layer of staff and organizers.

Furthermore, in 2018 the Women's March Inc. made the fateful decision to shift its attention from mass mobilization and social protest (on the streets, and in communities, and workplaces) to the electoral arena. The main slogan of the 2018 Women's March was "Power to the polls!": the idea being that it was time for the resistance to Trump to move from the streets to the ballot box, a move which it encouraged by contributing to the election of progressive women candidates to the Democratic Party in the last midterm election. The explicit intent of the Women's March Inc. organizers was to transform the momentum of the marches into "political power:" that is, into the ability to shape the agenda of a key group of progressive women representatives. As a result, most of the energies harnessed in the Women's March were redirected into electoral campaigns. To put it bluntly, electoralism contributed to curtailing the possibility of development of a mass movement. To make matters worse, the Democratic Party establishment paid the Women's March electoral activism back, by staging a virulent media campaign against the Women's March organizers' alleged anti-Semitism and then withdrawing the support of the Democratic National Committee. The campaign was successful in pushing several local groups to disaffiliate themselves from Women's March Inc., as well as in demobilizing, leading to the cancellation of several marches originally scheduled for January 2019 and to a much more modest participation in the marches that did take place.

Within a context dominated by the public visibility of the Women's March and other mainstream feminist organizations, the [International Women's Strike US](#) as well as various socialist, grassroots, and feminist organizations and networks have tried to contribute to the re-politicization of March 8 by organizing rallies and marches, working on creating the conditions for work stoppages, and popularizing the analyses and practical experiences of the feminist movement around the globe. Organizing for March 8 under the umbrella of the feminist strike required facing a further difficulty, namely the steady decline of unionism and strikes, caused by prohibitive labor laws and by the business orientation of most major unions – a decline interrupted by the eruption of the strike wave in the spring of 2018. While in countries like Italy or Spain, some labor organizations accepted the call for a legal general strike or work stoppage and managed to carry them out, in the United States this possibility was entirely barred from the outset.

And yet, within a transnational context characterized by a crisis of social reproduction and women and queer people's growing militancy, and a national context characterized by a strike wave involving mostly women workers and by the political radicalization of a new layer of activists, the potentials for a mass feminist movement are still in place. Realizing these potentialities will require deepening discussions around strategy among feminist activists, but it will also require a willingness to learn from the organizational and political processes taking place in other countries.

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