

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Movements > World level (Movements) > Internationals (socialist, communist, revolutionary) (Movements, World) > International (Fourth) (Movements, World) > Women (Fourth International) > **Resolution: The New Rise of the Women's Movement**

# Resolution: The New Rise of the Women's Movement

Thursday 5 August 2021, by [Fourth International](#) (Date first published: 24 February 2021).

## Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [1. The context](#)
- [2. What are the factors \(...\)](#)
- [3. What are the specificities](#)
- [4. What is its strategic \(...\)](#)
- [5. What is our orientation \(...\)](#)
- [6. Our internal tasks](#)

***“In order to change the conditions of life we must learn to see them through the eyes of women.”***

**Leon Trotsky, “[Against Bureaucracy, Progressive and Unprogressive](#)” (6 August 1923), in Problems of Everyday Life and Other Writings on Culture and Society, Monad Press, New York, 1973, p. 65.**

## Introduction

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

## 1. The context

In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic created a totally new context while highlighting essential features of the situation. Our 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress text in 2018 had underlined the general geopolitical chaos and crises existing today. The pandemic is a striking illustration of globalization with its rapid spread worldwide, and the chaos created by all capitalist governments' inability to manage the ensuing health, social and economic crises.

A tension has been created between the economic and health emergencies, in order to confuse and mislead a good part of the population about the seriousness and depth of the current stage of this civilizational crisis. To a large extent, the idea has spread that the pandemic was the cause of the economic crisis, when in fact capitalism in crisis is seeking to reorganize itself while hiding behind

the pandemic. Consequently, proposed measures against the social effects of the pandemic are presented as “special measures” that should give way as soon as possible to “normal” policies. This hides the fact that the pandemic arose in a capitalism that had in no way overcome the combined crises (financial, socio-economic, environmental, geo-political) still at work after 2007/8 behind the big lockdowns and specific blockages produced by Covid 19.

These ongoing interrelated crises particularly affect women – this is reinforced by the effects of the pandemic – and are engendering a generalized backlash against what is often called the “longest revolution”, which led to the increase of women’s rights during the last century.

The contradiction between women’s aspirations to a worthwhile life on the one hand and the worsening of their actual situation on the other underlies the new rise of women’s mobilizations and explains the comprehensive nature of the platforms that have often emerged and the development of the feminist women’s strike and experiences in local territories and communities as methods of action symbolizing a rejection of the system as a whole.

### **1.1 Covid-19 pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic is a product of the intersection of the underlying ecological and social crises: the distortion of human society’s relationship to nature (deforestation, collapse of biodiversity, trade in wild animals, industrial agriculture, genetic manipulations in animal and food production) and the incapacity of capitalist governments driven by profit to build and maintain effective health and other public services. It has also been a stark demonstration of global inequality in access to health care and resources, for example 90% of the available vaccine has been allocated to countries of the global north.

Governments have resorted to repressive lockdowns and curfews, often implemented – as the pandemic continues – in incoherent and unjustifiable ways because health services have been cut and cannot cope. Even after the first wave there was no injection of new resources to prepare for the inevitable second (or third) wave. This has also given the opportunity for conspiracy theories on manufactured virus and anti-vaccine campaigns to begin in themselves to become a threat to public health in some countries.

Women are bearing the brunt of the social cost of the pandemic. The pandemic has revealed starkly who are the “essential workers”: those necessary to the continuation of human life such as health and care workers, cleaning staff, workers and farmers in food distribution and production, teaching and administrative staff in education, transport workers. Women are also predominant in sectors decimated by the effects of lockdowns and curfews: hospitality and commerce and the informal sector. All these sectors are highly racialized and often have a high proportion of indigenous workers. These developments also strongly affect the LGBTIQ community, disproportionately centred in essential or precarious sectors.

When schools and childcare are closed the domestic burden on women is increased, with the stress and anxiety of trying to ensure that school children follow online teaching, when offered, and have the necessary equipment and conditions to do so adequately. The inadequacy of the resources offered is leading to an increased rate of dropping out. Women’s responsibilities as caregivers for sick and elderly family members have increased.

The restriction of other medical care while priority is given to Covid-19 patients hits many people, those with chronic conditions, such as cancer patients, and others who need regular care such as those living with HIV and trans people requiring regular medication. Pregnant women also require regular medical care before, during and after birth. It particularly affects women who need

*immediate* medical help to terminate unwanted and unplanned pregnancies.

For the hundreds of millions of women below the line of extreme poverty, desperate reliance on debt to survive has gotten even worse. Out of the 250 million microcredit clients, more than 80% are very poor women who suffer from high, often usurious, interest rates,.

Many migrants, both internal and international migrants, including thousands of women working particularly as domestic workers and in the textile sector, have been expelled from the places where they were working prepandemic. They migrated in the first place because they could not find employment at home and with the economic contraction caused by the pandemic this is even more the case and so they are left, often in rural communities, without any means of subsistence.

The lockdowns have also posed an additional threat to women confined with violent partners or family members, in these exacerbated conditions the incidence of domestic violence has risen demonstrably. In some countries measures were taken in the first wave to make it possible for women to report such incidents and find other accommodation but these were inadequate and short-lived. Many LGBTIQ people, especially younger people, have been forced back into birth families often resulting in violence and more extensively repression against them.

While governments have attempted to deal with the pandemic essentially through repressive and authoritarian measures, at local level – and very often on women’s initiative – support networks have been established, breaking the isolation imposed by lockdowns and home working. They take on tasks such as shopping for the elderly and vulnerable or making facemasks as well as providing emotional support when people fear the virus will kill them or those dear to them. Rural women producers have supported local and urban food production.

The health crisis highlights the centrality of women’s social reproduction work and echoes the demands for the revaluation of the care professions. It also puts to the fore the need for international solidarity and justice in access to health care and resources.

## **1.2 Neoliberalism**

Capitalist globalization, financialization, and the increasing internationalization of production lines have reduced the ability of governments to implement economic policies in the collective interests of the ruling classes. Imperialist countries still try to ensure favourable conditions for capital accumulation, but global capital operates more independently than before. The financial crises of 1996-1997 and 2007-2008 revealed the contradictions inherent in capitalist globalization with major consequences: political, social and structural – including the debt explosion, the revitalization of organized crime, and even the resurgence of human slavery. Major private banks have set out to conquer new markets and customers by reaching hundreds of millions of people through microcredit, in particular women who do not have a bank account.

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

As a result of the growth of globalized, unregulated capital, government corruption and incompetence, and the impoverishment of vast swathes of the population, organized crime has emerged as a major economic and social player on the world stage. Not limited to drug smuggling and sales, it has expanded to include human trafficking for purposes of both sexual and labour exploitation as its second-largest money-maker along with illicit arms dealing, inducting thousands of youth into its ranks and bringing with it unheard-of levels of violence to communities.

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

### **1.3 Rise of far right, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, anti “gender ideology”**

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

The renewal of the radical right strengthens a reactionary thrust that aims to undermine the rights of women and LGBTIQ people; abortion and reproductive rights in general, family law, and triggering witch hunts against LGBTIQ people.

Some movements clearly attack women and LGBTIQ people, often presenting homosexuality and LGBTIQ rights as imperialist exports. Others, under the pretext of defending women and LGBTIQ people, target migrants and/or Muslims, claiming to defend women’s rights by banning veil or headscarf-wearing, accusing them of rape, or claiming that Islam is against homosexuality. As a result, the far right can experience tensions between those who want to appeal to the sexism and heterosexism of its base and those who instrumentalize women’s and LGBTIQ rights in the service of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant prejudice. However, in fact they reinforce each other.

Religious legal codes heavily depend on the family unit and the segregation of gender roles, imposing oppressive power relations on women’s bodies which endanger women’s lives. Fundamentalists often target women’s participation in the workplace, particularly factories, as being forbidden.

Other far right currents emerge as religious fundamentalism in all the “great” religions (or “national religious” fundamentalism such as the Zionist far right). They influence governments as important as the United States and Brazil and play a central role in some East European countries. Whether as evangelism or Roman Catholicism, extremist Christian currents are wreaking havoc in Latin America and Africa with deeply reactionary policies concerning women – notably on the question of abortion and women’s right to choose – and LGBTIQ people with anti-gender ideology which seeks to prop up traditional male and female roles and attack LGB and particularly trans rights. The Muslim world has a particular international dimension in religious fundamentalism, with “cross-border” movements like the Islamic State or the Taliban. Theofascist movements use systematic sexual violence against women and minors in the territories they control, mostly in the form of rape and sex slavery. They use this to recruit members and fight against other groups.

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

### **1.4 Climate disaster**

The climate disaster predicted for the future is already present in many regions of the globe. Climate change, the food crisis, the water crisis, environmental racism, the advancement of transnational companies over territories and their resources, extractivism – the exploitation of natural resources for profit – and the “financialization of life” are important parts of the reality of the global south.

Indigenous peoples, peasants and youth are at the forefront of environmental struggles, and women play a leading role among them. This is the product of their specific oppression, not their biological sex – as the non-essentialist ecofeminists have shown. Patriarchal society imposes social functions on

women directly linked to “caring” and places them at the forefront of environmental challenges.

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

### **1.5 Massive migration**

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

Women migrate, internationally and internally, in search of better living conditions for themselves and their families, or because of political persecution, or as a consequence of wars and local violence, or domestic violence. In the context of crisis, migration increases oppression and impacts on women’s exploitation. They suffer extreme impoverishment and loss of rights, facing gender discrimination, racism and exploitation. Women are also suffering “new” forms of work practically akin to slavery: confinement, prostitution and being trafficked.

Industrialized countries need migrant labour in both the formal and informal sectors. Nevertheless migrants have often become the target of xenophobic campaigns presenting them as enemies. Repressive laws limiting migration break up families, either placing on women the sole responsibility of caring for families as male family members migrate, or on the contrary forcing them to become migrant workers to earn for their families. The migration chain then throws an increasing burden on the women family members of those migrant women to care for the families left in the country of origin.

### **1.6 Crisis of reproduction**

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

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

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

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

But as capitalism has gone into deep economic crisis, it has been compelled to attack those very services and rights through austerity; aiming to retain women in the labour force while further driving down their wages and conditions. This has increased the burden on many women, compelled to do the work that previously the state had covered. They have also pushed many women out of the labour market or into even more precarious work. They have further created an increasing demand for even worse paid and more precarious women – including undocumented migrants – to do this work to enable other women to keep their place in the labour market.

## **2. What are the factors that caused this rise?**

### **2.1. Gains of the previous waves**

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

### **2.2 Feminization of labour**

Women work everywhere more than men... but part of their work is invisible: women continue to account for more than three-quarters of the world's unpaid care work in both the global South and North.

Even if the gap with men persists nevertheless, women are increasingly accessing the global labour market, worldwide 4 out of 10 workers are women. This increase is present in all regions even if some, such as North Africa and Western Asia, have a lower percentage (under 30%) than other regions of the global South.

Everywhere women are more likely to be obliged to work part-time, a trend that has increased with the Covid-19 pandemic. This underemployment can reach up to half of total female employment. Globally, nearly half of all women workers are in what the ILO calls “vulnerable employment”, particularly in agricultural enterprises, handicrafts and trade. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, this exceeds 70%.

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

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

A quarter of the world's female workforce still works in agriculture, which remains the main source of employment for women in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the feminization of the countryside is an increasing phenomenon. As more than 60% of the products that arrive in the cities are produced by producers of family and peasant agriculture, the role of women is key to the economy. But economic policies favour export-oriented sectors, mostly male, at the expense of local consumption. Thus as women constitute the majority of the world's small-scale farmers, their situation is still fragile.

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

protection, poor working conditions and gender-based violence.

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

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

The wage gap between women and men, on a global average, is estimated at 23%. Almost 40% of women are not in social protection schemes because of their work: in the informal sector, undeclared, on the black, occasional, in the home .... As a result, 200 million women who have reached retirement age have no pension at all. A total of 70% of the world's poor are women.

During the pandemic the massive use of teleworking, which brings home, paid work and domestic work together in the same place, is increasing the physical and mental burden on women. Many women are being forced to resign due to exhaustion caused by overwork, are dismissed or prevented from working, and are thus deprived of the means to support themselves independently.

During the pandemic the massive use of teleworking, which brings home, paid work and domestic work together in the same place, is increasing the physical and mental burden on women. Many women are being forced to resign due to exhaustion caused by overwork, are dismissed or prevented from working, and are thus deprived of the means to support themselves independently.

We do not yet have enough statistics to fully assess what this means for women's place in the labour market but we can certainly say that existing inequalities have deepened. The “feminization” of work means both the increasing numerical participation of women in the labour market and that, under the impact of neoliberal policies, the characteristic working conditions of women (precariousness, instability, vulnerability, underemployment, lack of rights and social protection, low unionization rates) tend to extend to the entire proletariat.

The precariousness of employment is constantly increasing, accounting for almost half of total employment, as is the share of the informal economy – involving more than six out of ten workers. The boundaries between paid work and leisure tend to blur – as in reproductive work – (you have to be at the service of bosses 24 hours a day) as well as those between personal and professional life. It means using feminized capacities and characteristics such as as an attractive presence, seduction, relationship care, empathy, multitasking ... in the service of the company.

### **2.3 The increase in gender-based violence**

Violence against women, socially constructed and then normalized by the state, enjoys impunity. Violent deaths occur in a complex web of discrimination and exploitation of women, by gender, and also by class, ethnicity, multiple risk situations, marginality, insecurity, militarization, migration, among others.

More than a third of the world's women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lives. The majority of women killed in an act of gender violence are killed by a partner or former partner. There is an escalation of gender-based crimes further aggravated since the 2008 crisis with destruction of public services and social protection, increasing women's care responsibilities and

tasks, reducing opportunities to escape violence, while austerity policies reduce funding for centres and shelters for women victims of violence. The increasing economic, psychological and sexual independence of young women makes them the object of “reprisals” by male members of their families. Hate crimes to “correct” the behaviour of women, lesbians, trans people who “betray” conservative codes are legitimized by the right-wing political and religious opinion makers.

Femicide, today recognized as one of the extreme forms of gender violence, is the murder and death of women resulting from diverse forms of violence just because they are women: physical, sexual, psychological, family, labour, institutional. This form of violence began to be noticed in the 1980s and was documented in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico from 1993; it was then traced throughout the country and is now recognized as a global and regional phenomenon in Latin America. The slogan *Ni Una Más!* coined by Mexican women, which became the slogan *Ni Una Menos* of the Argentine women 22 years later – today taken up throughout the world – is the palpable evidence of the persistence and the increase of this form of misogynist and macho violence and of the impunity and violation of human rights. Women in many countries organize to search for their disappeared daughters and to demand state justice in cases of femicide. By taking the name of the victims these campaigns often become emblematic cases.

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

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

In many countries, women are disappeared to be used as sexual slaves and for forced labour by trafficking and international organized crime networks. In many conflicts, rape is used as a weapon of war. There are a variety of motives behind this, from community humiliation to ethnic cleansing and the terrorization of civilian populations.

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

In the last two decades, under the pressure of the feminist movement demanding that the state assume responsibility and establish new legal frameworks to deal with violence, many countries have introduced legislation and public policies to confront inequality and address violence against women and femicide. However, in practice these policies have not been fully funded or implemented, much less able to eradicate violence, with government action contradicting its discourse. On the contrary, it is increasing while also becoming more visible through the energy and determination of women in denouncing it.

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



## 2.4 The increased role of women in society and social movements

Women have always been active participants in movements challenging the established order. But it is in recent decades that women as political subjects have clearly emerged at the forefront of mobilizations of all kinds.

Just to name a few: Maxima Acuña and her battle against mining in Peru; Berta Caceres, environmentalist and human rights activist in Honduras; Alaa Salaah, leader of the democratic revolt in Sudan; Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi of Black Lives Matter in the USA; Greta Thunberg in the global youth movement against climate change; Dayamani Barla, Jharkhand, India, leading a mass mobilization against the world's largest steel company ArcelorMittal; the Maasai Women's Pastoral Council in Loliondo, which leads the struggles for land; and Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA), a grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women in the San Francisco Bay area that played a key role in the approval in 2013 of the law on domestic workers' rights..

Women lead community resistance such as the women's march demanding protection of land, health and education belonging to more than 100 indigenous peoples in Brazil, or the leading role of indigenous women in Ecuador, outraged by the economic measures that sought to end fuel subsidies, impacting their daily lives. Canadian First Nations women and Native American women in the US have managed to stop the exploitation of natural resources in their territories.

Young women and students in Chile have been part of an impressive revolt that revealed that the model country of neoliberalism was a total fallacy by overturning Pinochet's constitution. The 8M Coordinadora Feminista in particular through its organisation of assemblies and its development of a feminist programme was pivotal in the process.

In the MENA region women who lead movements against tyrannies and social breakdown are forced to wage the ideological battle against the religious fundamentalism that permeates society and the state apparatus.

In Brazil and the United States, women have been at the forefront of protests against the disastrous handling of the pandemic by their governments, led by macho and authoritarian Presidents Bolsonaro and Trump.

In two countries of the former Soviet bloc, women are leading the struggle of the popular masses against autocratic and corrupt regimes. In Poland, they mobilized millions of people by challenging the already limited right to abortion, creating the space for a general growing over into democratic demands. In Belarus, they are at the forefront of popular struggles to have the results of the vote respected and to chase out the usurping government.

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

Thus, there is a notable growth of women's active and leading role in the social and political movement, entering fully into the national political processes, resisting the impoverishment of broad sections of the population caused by neoliberal policies.

We see that these are in fact struggles linked to the question of the defence of life, of social reproduction in the ecological, economic, social, cultural and sometimes spiritual sense. They go hand in hand with an increased awareness among the protagonists of the prevailing gender

inequality and patriarchal violence in their own environment and in society in general.

## **2.5 International antecedents of the new wave**

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

The World March of Women against Poverty and Violence was born in 1998 in the wake of the 1995 Beijing UN Women's Conference and inspired by the women's march in Quebec in the same year, but directed to grass roots women and street action with 17 demands and proposals for eliminating poverty and violence against women. It had a certain success during the period of the Social Forums and still exists in some countries.

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

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

## **2.6 Other currents in feminism**

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

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

Liberal feminism focuses on the feminization of enterprises, administrations and mainstream culture, without questioning their class and racial character, and on the contrary acting as an alibi for the exploitation of other social classes: immigrant, racialized, poor... This liberal bourgeois feminism has worked as a brake on new generations and other layers of non-privileged women identifying with feminism.

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

management.

The revival of a strain of feminism based on biological determinism and most visible in reactionary campaigns to restrict the rights of trans women to public spaces is another problematic obstacle.

### **3. What are the specificities of this movement**

The current cycle of mobilizations has its own characteristics, derived from the context in which it is occurring. On the one hand, we find questions that are specific to the historical period (of the crisis of the left, of the political subjects, of the neoliberal individualism that creeps into all spheres, of the distrust towards the political, of the loss and renewal of interest in strategy, etc, etc.) and, on the other hand, we find ourselves with our own forms of struggle, with a new grammar of the feminist movement. The feminist movement is a creative movement that can promote new debates and new tools to change the world.

#### **3.1 Growing geographical spread, broadened content**

The mobilizations have spread throughout the planet, acquiring greater resonance in Latin America and the periphery of Europe. Argentina, Brazil, Spain and recently Mexico are leading these mobilizations that have spread and are spreading elsewhere. The huge protests for the right to abortion in Poland in 2020 after the attempts of the Polish government to almost completely criminalize a woman's right to choose are part of this development as is the historic victory of Argentinian women in legalizing abortion at the close of 2020. The struggle for the right to one's own body, for the right to decide and the decriminalization of abortion, as well as the struggle against macho violence (and in particular against femicide and sexual violence) have been the main axes of mobilization.

The feminist strike has become a central articulating axis of the feminist movement at the international level, extending to the whole planet. This feminist strike connects with a moment in which women are in the front line, as vanguard, of the fightbacks against neoliberal policies, and these fightbacks have their own form in each country. In the USA, it has been articulated around the rejection of Trump. In the Middle East and North Africa region the role that women are playing in social and political mobilizations is undeniable.

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

It is also important to make other forms of resistance which do not use the strike better known internationally: uprisings, peaceful occupations and cultural struggles.

#### **3.2 New generations and new sectors**

The irruption of young women in the mobilizations is growing and these new generations bring with them a new way of understanding feminism and political work, starting from their own personal experience of daily macho violence. In many cases, this irruption accompanies a challenge to the hegemony of institutional feminism, given that mobilizations arise from a crisis of the answers given by that feminism to women's problems and needs.

This starting from the personal is not new in the feminist movement, where the personal has always

been political, but it connects to how the younger generations relate to politics and construct themselves as subjects, how they reaffirm their individual and collective identity, what they expect from the self-organized structures of the movement, how they build spaces of mutual support. It expresses the need for a feminist subject who responds to current challenges, who incorporates these demands, who questions herself, reinvents herself, etc. It also involves the need to forge a collective political expression of women's renewed rebellion, which implies that the movement needs structures and spaces for women to debate democratically about how to build it, how to effectively enact change and attract increasing numbers of women. When these spaces do not exist, or are limited to academia, for example, the possibilities for creating truly strategic thinking are limited.

### **3.3 New concerns**

This focus on the personal is expressed in renewed and reinforced concerns such as the need for spaces for mutual support within feminist organizations, on the methods of debating and decision making, of building inclusive and participatory spaces, etc. and on questions of identity: the importance of sexual and emotional relationships, our gender identities, how we live our identity, valuing our daily lives, rethinking the way in which we relate to each other, etc... in the last instance of putting our lives at the centre, of the importance of affection, of care... Debates about motherhood, about everything that has to do with our bodies and sexuality, about how we use our time and much more. These reflections can lead to a concentration on individual experience and reaction rather than collective identification and action but on other occasions they contribute to foregrounding issues that have been present but not central in feminism, and generally absent from other social and political movements.

New subjects have burst onto the social and political scene, provoking determination to include and give visibility to these previously invisible subjects, taking on board questions of racism, racial/ethnic identity, sexuality and gender identity as well as other issues such as disability, mental illness, elderly, rural vs. city, etc.

The role of women, particularly young women, within the Black Lives Matter movement has been very noticeable as has been the specific mobilizations asserting that Black Trans Lives Matter.

The mutual aid movement, overwhelmingly led by women, operates on the principles of self care for mutual care that feminists- mainly the new generations of feminists, peasant women, indigenous women and others who organize in their territories - have valorized previously. They promote conscious principles of anti-discrimination and collective resistance. In the context of challenging the institutionalization of sections of the movement the slogan of "solidarity not charity" is key.

Some newer or more radical unions have stepped up their organizing in the "essential" sectors whose devaluation has been highlighted during the pandemic - and have recruited widely and built new structures. Some small but symbolic victories have been won in the context where overall the ruling classes have been successful in making the working class - particularly its racialized and women members - pay the price of the pandemic. This organizing also challenges the fact that traditional parties are happy to give workers in these feminized and racialized sectors empty gestures of support but completely fail to demand that they receive the material support their contribution to collective wellbeing merits either in terms of pay or working conditions.

### **3.4 New methods of struggle - feminist strike and experiences of women's places**

The feminist strike appears as the new method of struggle of this cycle of mobilizations in many countries, not only for its articulating power but fundamentally by questioning and broadening the strike as a tool of struggle. The feminist strike breaks the division between the productive and the

reproductive, pointing out the connections between the two, and putting the emphasis on the reproductive sphere as a strategy to put life at the centre.

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

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

The initiative of the International Women's Strike in 2017 meant a new proposal for international articulation, taking concrete form in the mass strike of 6 million in 2018 in the Spanish state, strikes in Italy, Belgium and Switzerland organized by the women's movement with trade unions, following the 2016 strikes in Argentina against gender violence and Poland on abortion rights. Women are not organized around the strike proposal as such everywhere. There are very diverse organizational expressions, in some countries these are strongly rooted in the demands and struggles of indigenous communities and nationalities.

What we call "experiences of place" is a way of highlighting how women organize in their urban and rural territories, building common struggles important for building resistance to attacks on rights. This creates the material conditions to stay alive, and even to survive the pandemic, since some governments do not take responsibility for the poorest people. There are different experiences in various places where women are leaders and protagonists, mainly in the Global South, but also in the peripheries of cities in the central capitalist countries. This is where popular power emerges through community work, self-organization and solidarity, from collectives of precarious and unemployed workers, women and youth from the peripheries, from peasant and ecological agriculture, from public schools, from teachers, mostly women, in struggle.

These experiences lived, felt, reflected and transformed, can be found in the more than 500 years of resistance to the colonial invasion that violates the territories of both the planet and dominated bodies, in ancestral wisdoms and cultures, in memories of collective subjects in struggle. They have an important place in overcoming extreme situations. They are all relevant to the task of constructing another society: building on our history, identifying the experiences that matter and transforming women's lives rooted in the places where they live, where they organize their resistance. The experience of the place shows the importance of the place in this popular feminism that is developing in the world and its role today.

### **3.5 New theoretical understandings**

The contributions of anti-capitalist ecofeminism and feminist economics theorize how capital clashes with life, and how feminism, by reorganizing time and work, can break with that logic and question the system (or set of systems of oppression), proposing another way of relating to nature and satisfying our vital needs. This rejects the equation made by "essentialist" ecofeminism that women have a special relationship with nature because they give birth. The way in which capitalism has historically responded to its need to ensure the reproduction of the labour force, the assignation of women to this reproductive work, makes women more aware of the needs of life and of material limits and bases, including their territories.

Social reproduction theory develops on this point, on capitalism's need for reproductive labour. It developed from work by Marxist feminists about the link between unpaid labour in the home necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist system and society, overwhelmingly done by women, and women's position in the labour market itself concentrated in sectors which mirror women's role in the family.

Intersectionality – as an understanding of how the experience of multiple oppressions is not a simple addition – has also strengthened our Marxist analysis.

Debates around Green New Deals and the need to create many more well-paid jobs across the whole of the care sector have spread much more widely amongst activist circles.

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

#### **4. What is its strategic importance?**

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

##### **4.1 Leading resistance of the dominated classes as a whole**

The immediate consequences of the process of capitalist recovery from the 2007-08 crisis are twofold: the generalization and worsening of precarious living conditions, which affect more and more people, in more severe situations, reducing the margin between precariousness and exclusion; and the appearance of a crisis of social reproduction in the countries of the global North similar to that which already existed in the countries of the South, linked to a phenomenon of "peripheralization of the centre". It is women who have endured the crisis and woven the safety nets of last resort, in many cases at the cost of their own exhaustion and the lifelong limitation of their opportunities to develop as full and autonomous beings. It is in these margins, in the spaces linked to social reproduction and the increasingly precarious sustainability of life, that the main battles are currently taking place and a new cycle of struggles is being articulated.

We speak, therefore, not only of a rise of the feminist movement, but also of a phenomenon of "feminization of protest". Broadly speaking and this is even more true since the start of the pandemic, there are five fields in which women are leading the struggles and fightbacks: for public services (and, in Europe, against the dismantling of welfare states); for decent housing; for food sovereignty and for the right to land and water (which have intersected with the new movements for climate justice and against extractivism); for the improvement of working conditions and winning rights in what were until now the "margins of the labour market" but which in the current phase of capitalist crisis are expanding and constituting more and more the norm (precarious sectors, informal, zero hours, geographically displaced, etc.), as well as in reproductive jobs; and resistances to the new neoliberalisms including the fight against illegitimate debts, especially abusive microcredits, that mobilize the poorest women. The pandemic however has put particular barriers on the ability of rural women in the global South to organize.

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

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

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

This process of democratization of the strike tool is likely to have long-term consequences: breaking with the monopoly of trade union bureaucracies over legitimately calling strikes. The 8 March mobilizations in 2018, 2019 and 2020 allowed a significant layer of women workers to organize a strike, in many cases for the first time in their lives. Self-confidence, empowerment, accumulated experience and the networks established by thousands of women can mean a qualitative leap for the whole class that can only be evaluated with the passage of time. The other element of democratization is the organization of the strike in sectors too often forgotten by the traditional trade union movement, such as care or consumption, which nevertheless were important in the labour movement of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: strikes against high prices or rents are good examples. In this sense, the democratization of the strike allows us to experience this tool on the margins of the labour market that we mentioned earlier, and reinforces the idea that these activities are also and above all work.

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

This does not mean that previously feminism was not related to the class struggle, nor that Marxism and feminism have become one single thing, nullifying the autonomy of the latter. Rather, in the current context of capitalist crisis, historically concrete forms of reproduction of capital contradict

the social sustainability of life in more and more regions of the world and are incompatible with basic feminist demands, making any feminist consciousness end up confronting the pillars of capitalist accumulation.

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

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

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

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

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

We thus fight to ensure that demands that come from the most marginalized groups are championed by the movement as a whole, as well as opposing discriminatory behaviour within the movement itself. We support the self-organization of particularly discriminated women as a condition for a concrete unitary and universalist movement.

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

### **5.2 Mass self-organized action**

This process of politicization and radicalization is also strengthened by the experience of grassroots self-organization, whether in the neighbourhoods, the rural areas, the workplaces or places of study. We therefore place the emphasis on collective action, organized by those concerned.

When campaigns are launched by small groups or collectives of feminist women, we fight to turn them towards the mass of women in the neighbourhoods, the workplaces etc by popularizing demands using appropriate means to reach out (leaflets, street theatre, flash mobs, open



discussions, petitions, social media) and proposing actions (pickets, demonstrations etc) that are open to and encourage participation from all women.

We do not support or organize violent vanguardist actions that tend to exclude and alienate most women and keep them from participating in the mass movement, although neither do we support their being repressed by the state. Where contact with institutions is necessary, we fight for representatives to be democratically chosen and for them to be accountable through reporting back in a democratic forum to the women involved.

The proposal of the feminist/women's strike enables such an orientation of mass action to address all women, those in the workplaces, in the informal sector, at home, by touching on all aspects of women's lives in both productive and reproductive work. We call on men to support the women's strike, by assuming – at least for 8 March – the invisible care work so that their partners, friends and colleagues will not be limited in their participation to all the actions planned during that day. In workplaces means participating in the strike in order to do that. As revolutionary Marxists we also explain, and hope to show in practice, the weight of collective action in workplaces in the fight to build a favourable relationship of forces.

### **5.3 Importance of international coordination**

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

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

### **5.4. Articulation with other social movements**

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

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

It also means fighting in other movements, and in particular the organized workers' movement and in a different way in the LGBTIQ movement, to show that women's specific demands are also demands of those movements. We support the autonomous organization of women (in various forms) within the overall social, trade union and political struggles and organizations as a condition for egalitarian mixed struggles.

## **6. Our internal tasks**

Women's liberation work is not simply a sector of work in itself but something that must influence every other area of our work and our entire organization. There should be particularly close collaboration with the LGBTIQ commission as well as with the anti-racist and ecological/climate change commissions.

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

Our women's work must continue to be organized on an international basis combining regional (continental) coordination with international coordination and a strong link with the international leadership bodies – through the IC Women's Commission, regular women's seminars and other appropriate forms. This must reflect organized work at national level.

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

*24 February 2021*

*Adopted (53 for, 3 No Votes) by the International Committee of the Fourth International*

---

### **P.S.**

• Fourth International. Thursday 4 March 2021:  
<https://fourth.international/en/international-committee/666/299>