

# International Women's Day, 2021

League for the Fifth International Sat, 06/03/2021 - 20:19

League for the Fifth International

2020 will long be remembered for the enormous scale of the public health, economic and social crisis triggered by Covid19. It should also be remembered because it exposed in the starkest terms how capitalism oppresses and exploits working women. The fact that women play a huge role in essential, but poorly paid and precarious, jobs, that the family home is all too often the site of domestic violence, which has shot up during the pandemic, and that, as the crisis ends, governments and employers will seek to make them pay for the costs of the crisis, all testifies to this.

Women have already paid the highest price during the crisis, whether as health workers on the frontlines in hospitals and care homes, or through increased childcare, including 'home learning' where schools have been closed. All this work is, of course, unpaid. Worse, they have suffered severe losses of income where they were forced to abandon their jobs in hospitality, retail or office work, all occupations where workforces are mostly female. Meanwhile, it was big capitalists like Jeff Bezos of Amazon who enriched themselves, super exploiting their workforces while denying them the right to join a union.

In the first weeks of the pandemic, women in healthcare and 'essential industries' were applauded by their fellow workers, but all the 'thanks' they will get from their bosses will be long term wage losses or permanent unemployment. In the so-called global south, in factories and sweat shops as well as in the villages, women face dangerous overcrowding and insanitary conditions, all helping the spread and severity of the pandemic. With terrible lack of healthcare, they will still have to wait a long time for vaccination. Peasant women and their families in India are already facing expropriation of their small landholdings during a new wave of land grabbing by big corporations and landlords.

Thus, we need to be clear that the pandemic and the lockdown measures have seen a dangerous pushback on the gains women had made in recent decades in the workplace and in society. They came on top of the effects of austerity and privatisation on public services like kindergartens, women's refuges and the wages and staffing levels of those who work in them. When politicians talk of 'building back better' it is these vital services we must fight to rebuild and extend.

Moreover, bourgeois governments, instead of learning even the simplest lessons from the pandemic, are likely to further privatise the care, educational and health sectors. There is a real danger that reactionary forces will urge women to 'return' to the family home, there to perform an increased amount of unpaid labour; reproducing workers' labour power and bringing up a new generation to be exploited in their turn. This danger points to the solution that Marxists have always advocated: the socialisation of domestic labour and the involvement of women in the whole range of (equally) paid employment.

The combination of economic crisis and pandemic has revealed the clear connection between women's oppression and class exploitation under capitalism. The coming year will be decisive in determining whether this will result in a successful resurgence of women's and class struggles against the bosses and

their governments, or in historic defeats.

Recent years have shown that women are not passive victims of exploitation and patriarchal oppression but that they have exposed them and fought back against them. The heroic struggles of women in the front lines of movements such as #MeToo, Ni Una Menos, the Women's Strike, Black Lives Matter, as well as the farmers' protests in India and movements for social and democratic rights in Belarus, Hong Kong, Myanmar or Lebanon, show there is good reason for hope. This hope, we think, needs to find a perspective in an international struggle with the goal of fully socialising reproductive and productive work.

This, of course, can only be achieved with the revival or formation of organisations of militant class struggle. Over the past years, many important steps were made to develop such organisations. Many struggling women increasingly see themselves as part of a global movement against both patriarchy and capitalism.

We think that this calls for the preparation of a global mass conference of the women's movements, similar in spirit to the early continental and world social forums, bringing together the experiences of different working women's movements but, more than that, giving them a common direction through mutually agreed action. This could send a strong signal around the entire world.

Comrades of the League for the Fifth International are doing their best to contribute to the building of such a movement. They would likewise do all they can to argue for an alternative vision of society, socialism, to achieve women's liberation, workers' liberation, liberation for lesbian, gay, trans, and non-binary gendered people. If thousands of international activists gathered in person and online to discuss together the way forward, this would strengthen the struggles going on all over the world by bringing them solidarity and support.

We call on those who agree with this proposal to contact us, and one another, to discuss what first steps we could take together, to win more and bigger forces such as the trade unions, working class parties and whole women's movements, like the women's strike, for such a goal.

The protests on March 8 this year are therefore particularly crucial as they will be a show of strength and self-consciousness about the need to fight back in one of capitalism's greatest ever crises.

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