Women's struggles today

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Women continue to face fierce austerity attacks on welfare, jobs, trade union rights, education, healthcare, childcare— the list seems to never end. Shouldering the double burden of unpaid domestic and waged labour, it is left to women to pick up the pieces when the social fabric is destroyed through cuts.

They make up the majority of workers in part-time, precarious, non-unionised and low paid jobs. The World Economic Forum estimates that it will take 118 years for women to reach income equality around the world.

When forced to flee from the horrors of war in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and many African countries, women face physical assault, exploitation and sexual harassment on their journey as refugees through Europe.

Women face brutal physical attacks, as shown by the horrific murders of Jyoti Singh, a young Indian medical student, in Delhi in late 2012 and, more recently, the young Kurdish woman, Özgecan Aslan, in southeastern Turkey in early 2015.

In addition, as reactionary right-wing politics gain ground across the world, women’s access to contraception and abortion is under renewed attack. In the US, 162 abortion clinics have closed since 2011 due to new laws that restrict family planning centres, with only 21 opening up. Abortion clinics are threatened by gun attacks, such as the Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood shootings in November.

The Zika virus epidemic lays bare the hypocrisy. Brazilian health authorities warned women to avoid pregnancy in a country where access to contraception is limited and abortion is illegal, except in extreme circumstances. In Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, abortion is illegal under any circumstances.

But women are organising and fighting back.

Jyoti’s violent killing mobilised millions on the streets across India, who battled with police and forced the Indian government into action. After Özgecan’s death, thousands of women across Turkey took to the streets, with the slogan “We aren't mourning, we’re rebelling!”.

In Ireland, women started tweeting details of their periods to the Taoiseach as part of a campaign to repeal the act that criminalises abortion. ROSA, a grassroots organisation, has deployed an “abortion bus” to tour major cities, informing women where and how they could obtain abortion pills, risking 14 years in prison.

Black women in the USA have been at the forefront of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and Fight for $15
campaign, the latter driving a rebirth of the American labour movement. Activists from the former have been organising marches, die-ins, protests, and otherwise leading various responses to police brutality; they launched #SayHerName in May to expose police brutality and anti-Black violence against black women.

In southern India, tea plantation workers have demanded better wages, improved welfare provisions and an end to the corrupt alliance between the trade union leaders and plantation companies. A strike wave began in Munnar in September, with 12,000 Dalit, or ?lower caste?, Tamil women workers winning their demands, which sparked another 300,000 workers to take action. More than 300 women workers at the Ambanad TR and Tea Company started their strike by holding its manager hostage.

No round up of women in struggle over the past year would be complete without highlighting the courageous Rojava fighters, the YPJ (Women’s Defence Units), who are on the front line against Islamic State (IS) militants in Syria. They are fighting for their communities, their future and their liberation.

The current anger and mobilisation we see around the world should be the starting point for a strong international women’s movement that fights against our structural oppression. A new women’s movement must, from the outset, be part of the labour movement, as a working class women’s movement.

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