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Anti-capitalist movement

Criminalisation of social movements and poverty: a feminist outlook

- IV Online magazine - 2009 - IV414 - July 2009 -

Publication date: Friday 31 July 2009

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The headway made by globalised capitalism, especially in Latin America, has set this region in the eye of the hurricane of social protest and the convergence of different anti-capitalist struggles.

A few years ago, sectors of the anticapitalist feminist movement joined in with this convergence, thereby contributing the transversal nature of feminist analysis in many debates and articles. The convergence of these forms of popular resistance has been fundamental to break through the blinders portraying “savage capitalism” as the only alternative. As

Claudio Katz says, “the workers, the exploited and the oppressed of the entire planet are the antagonists of 21st-Century imperialism”. However the repeated attempts to criminalise social movements and poverty via State apparatus (police, sectors of the judicial power, etc.) and the major communications media, as well as jailing and killing activists, place us up against several crossroads.

In a world where there is more and more exclusion and violence, where 70% of poor people are females, the role of women in anticapitalist movements and the repercussions of criminalisation on their lives warrant a brief reflection.

Women against privatisation and destruction of natural resources

The macabre combination of production restructuring, suspension of rights, military intervention in countries of the periphery and takeover of natural resources, overseen by patriarchal capitalism has a harsh impact on women. This is why the struggle against “green deserts”, against agribusiness transnationals and against privatisation of water have a women’s face, as women are the people who also ensure food sovereignty through their subsistence activities; and it is women who walk for many kilometres in the heat of the Nordeste region’s semi-arid earth in search of the water their families will use.

The action by Via Campesina women in Brazil, who destroyed the Aracruz Celulosa substitution for eucalyptus, was a victorious example of women playing a leading role. The struggle for the preservation of forests and rivers resulted in the sentencing of the “women burners of coco and women living along riverbanks, whose sustainable way of life based on fishing and extractive activities assures their survival and the survival of our Amazonia. In all the corners of “Our America”, in Oaxaca or Ciudad Juárez, in Caracas neighbourhoods or Quito streets, women’s participation can be perceived, along with their determination not to submit to the imperialist neocolonisation of our continent, also speaking out against Latin-American pro-imperialist governments complicit with these aims.

The struggle for legalised abortion is the focus of criminalisation

Despite various initiatives by the Latin-American movement and some important victories – such as the decriminalisation of abortion in Mexico until the twelfth week of gestation – we are being subjected to a strong offensive by religious and conservative sectors who, putting into practice the “Campaigns for Life”, are implementing a strong lobby campaign to get laws criminalising abortion tightened up further still. This is what happened in Nicaragua slightly more than one year ago when criminalisation of therapeutic abortion was voted. Here in Brazil, women are harassed by the three State powers. President Lula continues to compromise with the Vatican, sending signals, including about the possibility of putting religious education on the school curriculum. At the end of 2008, Congress chairman MP Arlindo Chinaglia brought in the creation of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI, for the initials in Portuguese) of abortion, with as a mandate no less than the institutionalisation of criminalisation of women who defend legalisation of abortion and those who are obliged to carry it out.

Moreover, we were recently surprised by an arbitrary action by the Judiciary of the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, in the town of Campo Grande, which cited more than ten thousand women for practising abortion, using as proof the medical records requisitioned in a clandestine clinic. Out of these women, some 1,200 are facing trial, reliving their personal dramas, cruelly exposed. Thus, if we analyse the way capitalism commoditises and controls basic aspects of women’s lives, using them as instruments and exploiting them on the basis of the foundations of patriarchy, then we can understand why the active part taken by women has become so noteworthy in anticapitalist movements. In consequence, it can be taken for granted that they are in the sights of criminalisation due to their participation in these movements.