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Greece

The urgency of an independent women's movement against debt and austerity measures

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV445 - February 2012 -

Publication date: Wednesday 1 February 2012

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Why have an independent women's movement against the debt and austerity measures in Greece? Because the debt crisis and the subsequent austerity measures affect us women first, in every aspect of our lives. So if we women don't organise ourselves to resist, no one else will do it for us

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But why do the debt crisis and the austerity measures affect women more especially?

Because neo-liberal austerity during the debt crisis is aimed particularly at what is left of the welfare State and public services. By dismantling or privatising public services, the State disclaims the social responsibilities it had towards its citizens and shifts them – once again – onto the family. So that the care of children, sick people, old people and handicapped people, even young people in great difficulty and out of work, is no longer the State's responsibility, but the family's, provided free of charge into the bargain!

But the notion of family is very general and abstract. In reality, as everyone knows, in a family it's the women who take on - practically all alone and without any remuneration whatever –all these basic social duties of the State. So the neo-liberal State kills two birds with one stone: it rids itself entirely of the social obligations that "widen the deficit and therefore, the public debt" and forces us women to shoulder them ourselves by working for absolutely nothing!

In other words, women are forced to do the job of, or rather replace the welfare State ...

Yes, but there's more to it than that. There's the other side of the coin, another reason that all these Memorandums are aimed at us: we are the first to be affected by the massive lay-offs that go with the dismantling or privatisation of public social services of every kind, because women make up the great majority of the workforce in these departments.

The conclusion is simple and concerns thousands of female wage-earners in our country: not only are we the first to be laid off with absolutely no hope of being re-hired, especially if we are already mothers or of child-bearing age. Not only are there masses of us left unemployed, especially young people with no professional future to look forward to. Not only are we condemned to poverty and precarity, but they also burden us with the tasks that were the job of the State, with all that it brings in terms of fatigue, stress, premature ageing, unpaid work and additional expenses!

Yes, but there are also those that say - the State first of all, but also the Church and so-called well-meaning people - that this way women can return to their real mission, which is to devote themselves to their home and family.

Of course they do! Not only do they say it, they shout it from the housetops because the inhuman policy of the Memorandums has to come in an ideological wrapping! It's just cheap propaganda that uses the most sexist of reactionary clichés to mask the ferocity of their neo-liberal policies. In fact, what we are seeing is something apparently paradoxical: an alliance between the height of capitalist policy-making, as seen in the brutal austerity of the Memorandums, and the proponents of the most obscurantist theories of a bygone age who want to convince us that it is a woman's "nature" to be shut up in the home with no other "tasks" than those of a mother and/or spouse. It's the union between IMF Memorandums and the European Commission who say they want to "modernise" us, and the

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bastions of the most anachronistic and misogynous patriarchy embodied by the Church or the right and extreme right.

Is it only propaganda or are there practical consequences for women ...

Yes, it's not just a question of theories and propaganda. The worst thing is the very tangible and disastrous effects on our daily lives. To put it bluntly, this return to a distant past is accompanied by measures designed to deprive women of the few rights and victories they've obtained through the struggles of the last few decades. The Holy Alliance of Capital and Patriarchy effectively abolishes our right to work, and with it, our right to economic independence. It forces us once again to a life of dependency, deprived of the right to free will. It treats us as slaves that have to shoulder the tasks and services formerly provided by the welfare State, because it is supposedly in the "nature" of women to do the work of a kindergarten, old people's home, hospital, restaurant, laundry, psychiatric ward, extra schooling and even job centre for unemployed family members. And all totally free, with no payment, no recognition, because supposedly it's in a woman's blood to "sacrifice herself" for others. With the result that she never has time to take a break, look after her own personality or take an active part in public affairs.

All this must take a high toll on women ...

Yes, it does. Not only because this daily stress means they age prematurely, that they get worn out, but also because all this sexism around the so-called "feminine nature" leads to the treatment of woman as an inferior being, whose body is considered to be always available and which any man can vent his frustrations on. It's not just a coincidence that the cases of violence against women, which were already numerous, are increasing in this period of capitalism and Memorandums.

It's for all these reasons, and for many others too, that the conclusion is simple: our resistance to this offensive against women by the Troika government and the Memorandums calls for us to organise ourselves and develop an independent and autonomous women's movement against debt and austerity. Not only because no one can do it for us, but also because capitalism and patriarchy are so closely intertwined that any fight against one of these tyrants will be a shaky one if it is not also fought against the other ...