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May Day in Chile

# **“We organize to remake our lives”**

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**Last October, Chile's neoliberal order was shaken by a popular revolt. Pushed into a corner, the mainstream parties agreed a national referendum, scheduled for April 26, 2020 and since postponed, to rewrite the Constitution, a holdover from the Pinochet dictatorship. On March 8 and 9, millions of women and gender non-conforming people struck and took to the streets on International Women's Day in the largest protests in the world on that day. Now the coronavirus has forced this struggle into quarantine, making May Day mobilizations impossible. But Chilean workers, and especially its powerful feminist movement, continue to organize.**

This year's May 1st arrives in the context of a global crisis. The planetary impact of Covid-19 affirms with renewed strength the internationalism of our struggles and of the meaning of this date. Today, we workers face profound problems in all parts of the world. While total or partial economic paralysis already is affecting about 81 percent of the global workforce, millions more are at risk of losing their income and their jobs permanently. [1] At the same time, the crisis impacting the reproduction of human life itself has further intensified the productive and reproductive work carried out by women and non-gender conforming people, while making it all the more precarious.

We know that the measures adopted by various governments point in the same general direction, that is, protecting corporate profits in a direct attack on our existence. We also know that these attacks and the current crisis did not begin with the virus, rather the virus exposed a long-standing crisis in the capitalist organization of work and life, an arrangement that forces millions of people in lives of total uncertainty now and in the future.

Precisely because we do not want the future to be like the present, because we do not want so many people to have to choose between risking their health by going to work and hunger if they do not, and because we will defy the normalization of violence that they want to impose on us, the peoples of Chile have decided to rise up in revolt against these precarious living conditions and to challenge those whose policies have sustained this reality for decades. We stayed in the streets for five months without rest, we overcame our fear, we fractured neoliberal normality. We embrace a slogan that was born from 30 years of injustice, one that defines our vision: We will fight until life is worth living, luchamos hasta que valga la pena vivir.

Just one week prior to the need for social distancing, four million women and gender non-conforming people burst into the streets all across Chile on a historic March 8 and 9. The vitality of the revolt was manifested in the General Feminist Strike, when came together and demanded - as we do today - the departure of this criminal government, the end of impunity for its leaders and the cessation of state terrorism. We stand in defense of a feminist program to transform all aspects of our society and affirm that we are going to remake our lives into the kind of lives we want to live, the kind of lives that have been denied to us. On March 8 and 9, on International Working Women's Day, we demonstrated that the Chilean revolt belongs to the peoples and that as long as the peoples decide not to let it end it, the revolt continues.

Today we are those same women and gender non-conforming people who are on the front lines of the caring professions that sustain life, those essential jobs that cannot be stopped, these same jobs that are precarious, insecure, poorly-paid, or even unpaid. We are on the front lines of those who have never enjoyed set schedules and limited hours of work. Today, it is these same women and gender non-conforming people who are trapped, too many of us, in quarantine with our aggressors. We have told ourselves that our very lives are a political problem, and today we know this is truer than ever. That is why we have put together a [Feminist Emergency Plan](#) in the face of the crisis and, together with other feminist organizations, we have formed a Support Network that recently launched a [campaign to confront misogynist violence](#) in the current context.

Faced with the current comprehensive crisis, a question rises across the entire world this May 1st: What are we going to do now? If we had good reasons in October to rise up, we have more reasons today.

We will not deceive ourselves. The democratic transition after Pinochet's exit was little more than a co-governing arrangement, split between two political blocs dedicated to administering the same dictatorial legacy and, fundamentally, the same program, a program that aimed to prevent the political and organic rearmament of the popular sectors. They ruled for decades and continue to govern without having done anything to benefit the workers. In the most critical moments of our recent history, when the peoples decided to settle accounts with them, many of the parties that presented themselves as an alternative to this transition duopoly, lined up in defense of this model and against popular interests. These parties approved the repressive laws with which they tried to crush the revolt and sentenced the uprisings' protagonists to jail so as to exclude them from the vital process of reconstituting the governing power that we had already undertaken. [\[2\]](#) They are all responsible.

We affirm that, as we did before, we workers have now united and we can only rely on confidence in our own forces to face, and overcome, the urgent problems arising before us. We are preparing to challenge, once again, the policies with which this criminal government and the parties that subordinate to it, intend to make us pay for a crisis that we did not create. Our unemployment funds are being consumed and our pension funds are disappearing without employers having to pay a single peso in remuneration, without anyone stopping all our efforts from a lifetime of work being bled dry. These policies mean hunger for today and hunger for tomorrow.

We are preparing to fight poverty based on class solidarity, we will keep ourselves together and to prevent competition from prevailing between us and against us, because when poverty pits workers against workers, the wealthy only gain ground to depress our living conditions.

May 1st has so far not been a date on which feminists traditionally take the floor, but we have spent time reflecting deeply and collectively articulating about what we want to say. We have done so as the Committee of Workers and Trade Unionists of the March 8 Feminist Collective in Feminism, Labor and Social Security Assemblies and in the Plurinational Meetings of People in Struggle. And one year ago, we carried out our first Feminist May 1st action in Santiago. This year, virtually, we will meet again to say publicly that there is an alternative to fight for and to ask everyone to join us in this struggle.

This 1st of May we will take another step forward, calling for the building of a Feminist Organization of Workers, one that commits to unity in times of fragmentation and precarious work. A space in which women and gender non-conforming people can come together across all the different jobs we perform - formal, informal, paid or not - including people laid off from their work. We call for the creation of a space in which the broad layers of women workers who have not yet found a place to participate in the traditional union forms may meet in solidarity and united action with unionized women in order to develop our still-dispersed power together.

A democratic space of, by, and for the rank and file from which we can take stock of the workers' organizations of the last decades and also assess the place that women and gender non-conforming people we have occupied in them, as well as the work we perform. A space that makes life-sustaining care work visible and to promote the General Feminist Strike as a means to conquer its socialization, that is, to ensure that society take responsibility for its costs.

This May 1st we must call on our feminist memory and our vision of the future. We call for the construction of a Feminist Organization of Workers that follows the red thread of history uniting us with the workers of Chicago in 1886, the thread that women embroidered in those first strikes that gave rise to March 8, the red thread picked up by Chilean workers through their Industrial Councils (*Cordones Industriales*) and land seizures. We make these struggles our own, and we claim a place as protagonists in the destinies of our present and future struggles.

## “We organize to remake our lives”

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This May 1st we are internationalists because our struggles know no borders. We join in cross-border coordination with feminists from multiple territories and continents to affirm together that society can be organized on new bases, that a life without patriarchal violence, without racism and free from exploitation, is possible. That relations between peoples can be re-founded based on solidarity and from what our efforts have already accomplished.

Today we extend our greetings to all the workers of the world from our country where pandemic intersects with revolt in the certainty that rebellion is contagious too.

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[1] ILO 7 April 2020 "[ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition](#)".

[2] See Javier Pineda "[Chile: The debate on the Constituent Assembly](#)".