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Women

A feminism to end capitalism

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Although it has been seen as a secondary struggle through much of the history of the workers' movement, today feminism is taking the lead in the resistance against austerity capitalism. It is a vibrant movement characterized by radicalism, a capacity for self-organization, a mass audience and a broad potential to absorb other struggles.

The response to the call for the women's strike on 8 March 2017, as well as all the examples of women's marches around the world, kicked off a new cycle of feminist mobilizations. The first strikes and massive mobilizations that both Macri (Argentina) and Trump (USA) faced were feminist. And for some years now, the role of women have played in the Arab spring, in the mobilizations in defence of the public sector, or in peasant protests in Latin America, is no coincidence.

The neoliberal and misogynist offensive of austerity plans is encountering strong resistance from women. Women, those who assume the reproductive burdens inside and outside the home, inside and outside the market, inside and outside of employment. The policies of repayment and debt represent a double or triple twist of the screw for us in all these spheres.

However, not all women transversally suffer the same ravages of the crisis. The women of the bourgeoisie, of the establishment, of the ruling classes or of the state apparatus are not affected by the same experiences of dispossession. Although all of us are required to play a gender role, not all of us find the same solutions, nor do we all make the same demands.

There have been many debates both within Marxism and of feminism about the relationship between gender and class. I argue that we are a strategic sector of the class itself and therefore of anti-capitalist combat. This conception implies, on the one hand, avoiding self-centred identity politics and analyses. Both the identity of a single Woman where different oppressions are hidden (class, race, sexuality and so on); as well as a range of plural identities detached from the material conditions that lead to their emergence (and convergence!).

On the other hand, the second, symmetrical, error is a narrow and homogeneous view of class, as well as of strategy. A vision where the issues around social reproduction are always put off as something to be resolved after the great day of the revolution, as if it would come suddenly and solve everything. This is all the more mistaken given that self-organization of reproductive work is a necessary condition to sustain a challenge to capitalism over time.

Despite the radicalism of feminism, there is a general illusion that we should aim for a return to the golden age of "welfare" This is a "golden age" that was not really such for most women but continues to function as a desirable horizon. The crisis is creating increasing gaps in reproductive functions that had previously been assumed by the state (education, health, social services and so on). And what are the neoliberal recipes to fill these gaps? That they are privatized or performed in the home! We are experiencing a clash between expectations that are not going to be realized in this phase of capitalism and a new cycle of mobilization for which there are not sufficiently developed socio-economic strategies.

In that clash we can return to the thread that Nancy Fraser has recently begun to elaborate. Fraser explains how in the final period of the second wave of feminism, individualist neoliberalism was combined with the pressure for feminism to only take up demands for recognition. This was a politics based on the idea of what was "realistic", that subordinated demands for redistribution as well as overall criticism of the system. The recognition that was achieved was for those who could rise socially. Those who could be empowered by "female empowerment". Those who could

be successful inside neoliberalism.

This is exactly right – feminism is not necessarily anti-capitalist. But today we are at the beginning of a cycle, how can we take advantage of that and avoid an individualistic outcome that only benefits a few? How can we rebuild the dialectic between recognition and redistribution? How do we reconstruct an anti-capitalist programme and a feminist self-organization strategy? Luckily, we have something on our side: the inherent contradictions of that individualistic and liberal feminism. Substantive contradictions between the defence of women's rights, the struggle against the oppressions we suffer, and not posing a perspective that transcends the system that produces such oppressions.

Many of the classic demands of feminism are still valid. However, many of them must pass through the sieve of past experiences: participation in the labour market has not led to the promised economic independence, nor to ending obligatory family service for the majority of women. Gender roles have been reproduced in jobs, the wage gap remains a structural factor and reconciliation of personal life and work has been addressed only towards women and to cheapen the female labour force. Reorganizing work- remains one of the outstanding tasks. A task that is still pending after decades of neoliberalism.

Placing mutual care above private interests in a cycle of accumulation by dispossession is a key issue. Mutual care - in addition to being an affective issue - also means ensuring everything that makes life possible: food, energy, housing, health ... If, in addition, we defend a “dignified life” - as expressed by the activists of feminist economy and ecofeminism - the range is widening. In this way, the interests of “women” are not only “our” interests, but the fundamental interests of the social majority and open a field where we can build alliances with other sectors dispossessed by capitalism.

PS:

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