

17 ENG

The feminist challenge in changing society, feminizing our perspectives and our movements -

-

Penny Duggan

The new rise of the women's movement (draft)

FI, 1991: Positive action and partybuilding among women (extract)

THE TYRANNY of STRUCTURELESSNESS
by Jo Freeman aka Joreen (1970) Extract

PRT: "Sanction policies in a feminist party"



International Institute for Research and Education - Amsterdam

THE NEW RISE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

1. THE CONTEXT

Our 17th World Congress text underlined the general geopolitical chaos and crisis existing today. This crisis particularly affects women and is engendering a generalized backlash against what is often called the “longest revolution” which has led to the increase of women’s rights during the last century.

The contradiction between (young) women’s aspirations to a worthwhile life on the one hand and the worsening of their actual situation on the other underlies the new rise of women’s mobilizations and explain the comprehensive nature of the platforms that have often emerged and the development of the feminist women's strike as a method of action symbolizing a rejection of the system as a whole.

1.1 Neoliberalism

Capitalist globalization, financialization, and the increasing internationalization of production lines have reduced the capacity of governments to implement economic policies in the collective interests of the ruling classes. Imperialist countries still try to ensure favourable conditions for capital accumulation, but global capital operates more independently than before. The financial crises of 1997-1997 and 2007-2008 revealed the contradictions inherent in capitalist globalization with major consequences: political, social and structural – including the debt explosion.

Unemployment, under- and precarious employment and a massive reduction in basic services (housing, education, welfare etc.), together with crises in agriculture, have had a massive impact on the ability of millions to survive.

All this particularly impacts on women both in paid and unpaid work. More women are in precarious employment, the informal sector or in areas where unemployment has soared. Cuts in services increase the amount of domestic labour needed to reproduce the household – a disproportionate amount of which falls on women.

1.2 Rise of far right, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, anti “gender ideology”

The rise of far right, authoritarian and religious fundamentalist currents, which while often linked are not always identical, has specific and disastrous consequences for women.

The renewal of the radical right strengthens a reactionary thrust that aims to undermine the rights of women and LGBTIQ people; abortion, family law, and triggering witch hunts against LGBTIQ people. They particularly target women who experience both racism and sexism. In many western countries they use Islamophobic propaganda, especially against Muslim women. Aggression against women wearing the veil is increasing.

While some movements clearly attack women and LGBTIQ people, others use homonationalism and femonationalism: under the pretext of defending women and LGBTIQ people, they attack groups like migrants or Muslims, accusing them of rape, or claiming that Islam is against homosexuality. As a result, the far right can experience tensions between those who want to appeal to the sexism and heterosexism of its base and those who instrumentalize women’s and LGBTIQ rights in the service of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant prejudice. However, in fact they reinforce each other and converge in seeing homosexuality and LGBTIQ rights as imperialist exports.

These practices impose oppressive power relations on women’s bodies and lives. Religious legal codes heavily depend on the family unit and the segregation of gender roles which endanger women’s lives.

Other far right currents emerge as religious fundamentalism in all the “great” religions (or “national religious” fundamentalism (the Zionist far right). They influence governments as important as the United States and Brazil and play a central role in some East European countries. Whether as evangelism or Roman Catholicism extremist Christian currents are wreaking havoc in Latin America and Africa with deeply reactionary policies concerning women – notably on the question of abortion and women’s right to choose – and LGBTIQ with anti-gender ideology which seeks to prop up traditional male and female roles and attack LGB and particularly trans rights. The Muslim world has no monopoly; but has a particular international dimension, with “cross-border” movements like the Islamic State or the Taliban. Theofascist movements use systematic sexual violence against women and minors in the territories they control, mostly in the form of rape and sex

slavery. They use this to recruit members and fight against other groups.

Neoliberal conservatism that aims to strengthen the patriarchal family has dramatically increased violence against women. Besides impunity for the perpetrators, cuts in material support to those experiencing this violence creates a social environment that encourages male violence.

1.3 Climate disaster

The climate disaster announced for the future is already present in many regions of the globe.

Indigenous peoples, peasants and youth are at the forefront of environmental struggles, and women play a leading role in these three sectors. This situation is the product of their specific oppression, not their biological sex – as the non-essentialist ecofeminists have shown. Patriarchy imposes social functions on women directly linked to “caring” and places them at the forefront of environmental challenges.

Women produce 80 per cent of basic food in the countries of the South, they are thus directly confronted with the ravages of climate change and agribusiness. Similarly, they take on most of the child-rearing and home maintenance tasks and so are directly confronted with the effects of environmental destruction and poisoning on the health and education of their communities. The self-organization of victims of climate chaos and their defence are part of the climate struggle, women in their communities are at the heart of these mobilizations.

1.4 Massive migration

There are significant population displacements: 250 million international migrants, 750 million internal migrants (displaced persons...) often due to structural economic changes with significant regional disparities. There is also permanent displacement due to wars, and now climate change. Two-thirds of international migration is between countries of a comparable level of development.

Women’s migration in the context of crisis deepens and increases oppression and impacts on women’s exploitation. The context is extreme impoverishment and loss of rights. Women migrate in search better living conditions for themselves and their families, or because of political persecution, or as a consequence of wars. In this context women face gender discrimination, racism and exploitation.

Women are also suffering “new” forms of work practically akin to slavery: confinement, prostitution and being trafficked.

Industrialized countries could easily welcome migrants but instead they have often become the target of xenophobic campaigns that are used to present migrants as enemies. This has especially significant consequences for women as repressive laws are used to break up families.

1.5 Crisis of reproduction

Capitalism has always had to ensure the reproduction of the labour force without which it could not function: reproduction of labour power is an integral part of the cycle of valorization of capital.

The patriarchal capitalist family form, reinforced by notions of the “breadwinner wage” throwing onto women within the family the responsibility for the tasks of reproduction, enabled capitalism to ensure this reproduction at least cost to itself.

This was an uneven process not only because the growth of capitalism itself has been uneven, so that today we see pre-capitalist remnants remaining in some parts of the globe, but because for both economic and political reasons different patterns developed in different situations.

When capitalism needed the mass of women to be a part of the labour force – notably in the post war boom of the advanced capitalist countries – it was compelled, in different ways depending both on the relationship of forces and the precise nature of the local economy, to provide some services through the state: education, healthcare, housing, childcare etc. This work, seen as female because it corresponds to women’s role in the family, was and is low paid and overwhelmingly performed by women, often ethnic minority and/or migrant women.

But as capitalism has gone into deep economic crisis, it has been compelled to attack those very services through austerity, while aiming to retain women in the labour force, but trying to further drive down their wages and conditions. The contradictions thus unleashed have increased the burden on many women, compelled to do the work that previously the state had covered. They have pushed many women out of the labour market or into even more precarious work. They have also created an increasing demand for even worse paid and more precarious women – including undocumented migrants – to do this work to enable

other women to keep their place in the labour market. This in turn throws an increasing burden on the women family members of those migrant women to care for the families left in the country of origin. This also poses a contradiction for capitalist states with their desire to limit migration.

2. WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT CAUSED THIS RISE?

2.1. Gains of the previous waves

The new generations have been able to benefit – in an uneven but combined way – from the achievements of the women's and LGBTIQ movement of previous waves: first, in formal rights, changes in family and legal codes, women's access to education and health, second, in reproductive and sexual rights and freedoms, and third, in openings in the professional, academic, cultural, political and media worlds. In several countries socialist (class struggle) feminist tendencies have successfully fought in – and with – the labour movement to improve labour rights.

2.2 Feminization of labour

Women work everywhere more than men... but part of their work is invisible: women continue to account for more than three-quarters of the world's unpaid care work. (In the countries of the global South, women work on average 9h20 per day for 8h07 for men, but they are paid only 5h10 for 6h40 for men. Women and men therefore work respectively 4h10 and 1h30 unpaid. In the North, the figures for women and men are respectively 8.10 and 7.40 hours of daily work, of which 3.30 and less than 2 hours are unpaid.)

Nevertheless, women are increasingly accessing the global labour market even if the gap with men persists.

Between 1980 and 2008, 552 million women entered the labour market. Globally, 4 out of 10 workers are women. In this period there was a significant increase in the female labour force in Latin America: from a quarter to a third in Central America and two fifths in South America.

In traditionally low-wage areas, such as North Africa, the percentage increased from 20 to 26; and in Western Asia from 23 to 27. The percentage has not changed much in Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where it was already over 40%, as well as in Southern Africa: 40%. This trend continues but has weakened in the

21st century.

And they have access to lower quality jobs!

Everywhere women are more likely to be obliged to work part-time. This underemployment can reach up to half of total female employment. Globally, nearly half of all women workers are in what the ILO calls "vulnerable employment", particularly in agricultural enterprises, handicrafts and trade. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, this exceeds 70%. (Underemployment can reach up to 40 or 50% of total female employment: 52.4 in Madagascar, 35 to 40% in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Indonesia, more than 25% in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Paraguay.)

The "feminisation" of work concerns all workers

This must be understood not only as the increasing numerical participation of women in the labour market but also in the sense that, under the impact of neoliberal policies, the characteristic conditions of the situation of women at work: precariousness, instability, vulnerability, underemployment, lack of rights and social protection, low unionization rates... tend to extend to the entire proletariat. The precariousness of employment is constantly increasing, accounting for almost half of total employment. So does the share of the informal economy, which concerns more than six out of ten workers and four out of five companies in the world.

The boundaries between paid work and leisure tend to blur - as in reproductive work - (you have to be at the service of bosses 24 hours a day) as well as those between personal and professional life. The use of feminized capacities and characteristics such as a beautiful presence, seduction, relationship care, empathy, multitasking are required... at the service of the company.

Neoliberal globalization has profoundly changed the structure of the economy and jobs

Overall, employment has shifted over the past twenty years from agriculture to industry and then to services, which employ about half of the workforce.

A quarter of the world's female workforce still works in agriculture, which remains the main source of employment for women in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. But economic policies favour export-oriented sectors, mostly male, at the expense of food crops. As women constitute the majority of the world's small-scale farmers, their situation is still fragile.

The presence of women in industry has declined since 1995. In general, they are concentrated in sectors such as textiles and clothing. In special economic zones (free trade zones), export industries employ a majority of women, often very young, and combine low wages with lack of social protection, dramatic working conditions and gender-based violence.

From 1995 to 2015, the share of services in women's employment became predominant on a world scale. Women everywhere are concentrated in certain sectors of activity: trade in middle-income countries, health and education in high-income countries. Overall, the high presence of women is associated with a high frequency of part-time work and relatively low wages, especially in sales, cleaning and catering. Their over-representation in health, education and social work is directly linked to gender stereotypes that devalue the qualifications required in these fields.

But more generally, flexibility and special conditions of hardship, including the ability to perform a variety of tasks and emotional involvement, require “typically feminine qualities” that shape new forms of servility.

The wage gap between women and men, on a global average, is estimated at 23%. Almost 40% of women do not contribute to social protection. As a result, 200 million women who have reached retirement age have no pension at all. A total of 70% of the world's poor are women.

2.3 The increase in gender-based violence

Violence against women, socially constructed and then normalized by the state, enjoys impunity. Violent deaths occur in a complex web of discrimination and exploitation of women, by gender, and also by class, ethnicity, multiple risk situations, marginality, insecurity, militarization, migration, among others.

More than a third of the world's women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lives. (WHO figures for 2013: 35.6% at the lowest level) The majority of women killed are killed by a partner or former partner. There is an escalation of gender-based crimes further aggravated by the 2008 crisis. The increasing economic, psychological and sexual independence of young women makes them the object of “reprisals” by male members of their families. Hate crimes to “correct” the behaviour of women, lesbians, trans and straight people who

“betray” conservative codes are legitimized by the right-wing political and religious opinion makers.

The neoliberal world order destabilizes all societies and social relations. In particular, the destruction of public services and social protection has an impact on family structures, increasing the tasks and responsibilities of care for women and reducing the opportunities to escape violence.

At the same time, austerity policies tend to reduce funding for centres and shelters for women victims of violence.

Femicide, today recognized as one of the extreme forms of gender violence, is the murder and death of women resulting from diverse forms of violence: physical, sexual, psychological, family, labour, institutional. This new form of extreme violence originally appeared in Ciudad Juarez in Mexico in 1993, it then increased throughout the country and is now recognized as a global and regional phenomenon in Latin America. The slogan Ni Una Más! coined by Mexican women, then the slogan Ni Una Menos of the Argentine women 22 years later – today taken up throughout the world – is the palpable evidence of the persistence and the increase of this form of misogynist and macho violence and of the impunity and violation of human rights. Women in many countries organize to search for their disappeared daughters and to demand state justice in cases of femicide. By taking the name of the victims these campaigns often become emblematic cases.

The MeToo movement, detonating in the United States, has had a global impact. Women have publicly denounced sexual harassment in different cultural, professional and social spheres and harassment at work thus breaking the silence and at the same time showing the obstacles they face in doing so denounce in a formal framework, and defending the legitimacy of public denunciation.

A new generation of young feminists has responded and reacted to sexual violence in universities by confronting university authorities and demanding responses and mechanisms to deal with sexual assaults.

In many countries, women are disappeared to be used as sexual slaves by trafficking and organized crime networks.

In many conflicts, rape is used as a weapon of war. It pursues a variety of motives, from community

humiliation to ethnic cleansing and the terrorization of civilian populations.

The tendency to reduce the labour force, as a result of capitalist globalization, increases women and children's migration (including children traveling alone). Migrant women have a higher rate of unemployment than men. Their conditions of labour and employment are linked to traditional gender roles.

This makes women more vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual violence, disappearances, prostitution, trafficking, extortion, separation from their families (many travel with children), arbitrary detention, illness, accidents and feminicide. As they are often responsible for children traveling with them, they become double targets and the difficulties increase because their status as undocumented workers makes it more difficult to obtain employment or services for them and their children.

In the last two decades, under the pressure of the feminist movement demanding that the state assume responsibility and establish new legal frameworks to deal with violence, many countries have introduced legislation and public policies to confront inequality and address violence against women and feminicide. However, in practice they have not been able to eradicate violence. On the contrary it is increasing while also becoming more visible through the energy and determination of women in denouncing it.

The obstacles faced by women who experience violence in accessing justice are related to gender discrimination, prejudices of inferiority of women and stereotypes that sustain a systemic culture and ideology. Women activists, human rights defenders, feminists who fight for the defence of women victims of violence face hostility and threats, are criminalized, and in some cases forced into exile.

2.4 The increased role of women in society and social movements

Women have always been active participants in movements challenging the established order, revolts for bread (or its equivalent), battles against exploitation and tyrannies. But it is in recent decades that women as political subjects have clearly emerged at the forefront of mobilizations of all kinds. From the environmental and territorial defence battles, led by peasant and indigenous women, but also within urban movements, against the predatory and devastating action of

multinationals on questions of land and water; in the struggles for human rights and against state and paramilitary repression, mobilisations against racism and the criminalisation/exclusion of migrants...

Just to name a few: Maxima Acuña and her battle against mining in Peru; Berta Caceres, human rights defender in Honduras; Alaa Salaaah, leader of the democratic revolt in Sudan; Black lives matter in the USA; Greta Thunberg in the young global movement against the climate change Fridays For Future. Dayamani Barla, Jharkhand, India, leading a mass mobilization against the largest steel company ArcelorMittal, the Maasai Women's Pastoral Council in Loliondo, which leads the struggles for land. Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA), a grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women in San Francisco Bay that played a key role in the approval in 2013 of the law on domestic workers' rights.

Women lead community resistance such as the women's march demanding protection of land, health and education belonging to more than 100 indigenous peoples in Brazil. Or the leading role of indigenous women in Ecuador, outraged by the economic measures that sought to end fuel subsidies, impacting their daily lives.

We are thus seeing a phenomenon of women's increasing protagonism in the social and political movement, entering fully into the national political process, as has been the case of Brazil against Bolsonaro, in the United States against Trump, in Ecuador against the IMF, and in other countries against the multiple attacks on neoliberal policies.

If we look more closely, we see that these are in fact struggles linked to the question of the defence of life, of social reproduction in the ecological, economic, social, cultural and sometimes spiritual sense.

These struggles go hand in hand with an increased awareness among the protagonists of the prevailing gender inequality in their own environment and in society in general. Structural male violence against women is becoming all the more unbearable.

The new feminist upsurge and the increasing important role of women in social movements have allowed the apparition of a new type of female political figures. The election of Ada Colau and our comrade Teresa Rodríguez in the Spanish State, the new (non-white) speakers from the left of DP in USA like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Rashida Tlahib, or Marielle Franco in Brazil, are some

examples.

2.5 The antecedents of the new wave

During the previous wave of the women's movement efforts were made for international coordination. In the late 1970s, the International Campaign for Abortion Rights was founded, which evolved and became the still active Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights. The first of the ongoing biannual Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros were held in Colombia in 1981. That conference decided to mark 25 November as a day against violence against women, this was adopted in 1995 by the UN as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The World March of Women against Poverty and Violence was born in 1998 in the wake of the 1995 Beijing UN Women's Conference but directed to grass roots women and street action. It had a certain success during the period of the Social Forums and still exists in some countries.

These attempts at international coordination went alongside moments of the rise of aspirational social movements on an international level and suffered from the same decline as those movements. However, the NGOization of the women's movement has enabled a certain international coordination to continue. There have been international meetings of rural women on the issue of food sovereignty (Nyeleni - Mali 2007); and the growing feminist positioning of Via Campesina, the major international peasant network, has developed.

At the same time, all the social revolts or revolutions that have broken out in recent decades have seen a strong participation of women who have developed their own framework for analysis and action within their movements: from women's law in the Zapatista movement, to the presence of women in the movements of Tahrir Square, Occupy, 15M, in the "Arab spring" and last but not least, the stunning example of Kurdish women combatants. In all these movements, it is no longer a question of prioritizing the struggles, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, democratic, anti-racist and anti-patriarchal, but on the contrary, an intersectional feminism that approaches all oppression in a combined way is beginning to emerge clearly.

2.6 Overcoming liberal and reformist feminism

Meanwhile, in highly industrialized countries that had experienced a certain degree of welfare state

during the postwar boom, liberal and reformist feminism have emerged as a by-product of the second wave of feminism.

Reformist feminism is characterized by the incorporation of feminist demands and often activists into social-democratic and other reformist parties, notably when they are in local or national government, adopting policies and giving funding for projects inspired by the women's movement but with little or no self-organization.

Liberal feminism focuses on the feminization of enterprises, administrations and mainstream culture, without questioning their class and racial character, and on the contrary acting as an alibi for the exploitation of other social classes: immigrant, racialized, poor... This is what Nancy Fraser calls "lean in feminism" and has worked as a brake on new generations and other layers of non-privileged women identifying with feminism. It led to many illusions about the idea of the gradual integration of women – of which women? – in the governing bodies, by breaking the famous "glass ceiling".

In the so-called Third World countries, the phenomenon of "NGOization" has developed i.e., the conditioning and progressive neutralization of women's movements within NGOs and within the framework of UN meetings, financed and professionalized by them to the detriment of their radicality and self-management.

Given the worsening living conditions and precarity following the 2008 crisis, in contrast to these gradualist illusions, the movements born in the 2010s have developed in clear opposition to this approach.

3. What are the specificities of this movement

The current cycle of mobilizations has its own characteristics, derived from the context in which it is occurring. On the one hand, we find questions that are specific to the historical period (of the crisis of the left, of the political subjects, of the neoliberal individualism that creeps into all spheres, of the distrust towards the political, of the loss and re-encounter with concern for strategy, etc, etc.) and, on the other hand, we find ourselves with our own forms of struggle, with a new grammar of the feminist movement. We start from the idea that at this moment the feminist movement is a creative movement that is able to put on the table new debates and new tools to change the world.

3.1 Geographical extension (stronger in Latin America, Western Europe, specificity of North America - mobilizations against Trump, Poland - abortive strike, but weak in Eastern Europe, the Arab region, Africa, Asia).

The mobilizations have spread throughout the planet, acquiring greater resonance in Latin America and the periphery of Europe. Argentina, Brazil, Spain and recently Mexico are leading these mobilizations that have spread and are spreading elsewhere. The struggle for the right to one's own body, for the right to decide and the decriminalization of abortion as well as the struggle against machista violence (and in particular against femicide and sexual violence) have been the main axes of mobilization.

The Feminist Strike has become a central articulating axis of the feminist movement at the international level, extending to the whole planet, but the most important is to understand how this feminist strike connects with a moment in which women are in the front line, as vanguard, of the fightbacks against neoliberal policies, and to understand that these fightbacks have their own form in each country. In the U.S., it is articulated around the rejection of Trump. In North Africa and the Arab region the role that women are playing in social and political mobilizations is undeniable.

The struggle against machista violence has also succeeded in articulating the movement at the international level, creating links, from Latin America to India and Europe. Although initiatives such as #metoo stand out due to the media coverage obtained, this identification with others and the focus on sexual violence has gone beyond these initiatives, in a continuous activity to make visible, denounce and self-organize in the face of such violence.

3.2 New generations

The irruption of young women in the mobilizations is growing and these new generations bring with them a new way of understanding feminism and political work, starting from their own personal experience of daily macho violence. In many cases, youth have come hand in hand with a questioning of hegemonic institutional feminism, while mobilizations arise from a crisis of the answers given by that feminism to our problems and needs.

This starting from the personal is not new in the feminist movement, where the personal has always

been political, but it does have to do with how the younger generations relate to politics and construct themselves as subjects, how they reaffirm their personal and collective identity, what they demand from the movement's spaces of self-organization, build spaces of feminist mutual support, etc. All this has to do with the need for a feminist subject who responds to current challenges, who incorporates these demands, who questions herself, who reinvents herself, etc.

3.3 New concerns

This attention to the personal is expressed in new concerns such as the need for care in spaces of self-organization, in the care of details that have to do with decision making and the way of debating, of building inclusive and participatory spaces, etc. and also with what concerns us: the relevance of affective-sexual aspects, of gender identities, of the expression of our way of living our identity, of the need to value our daily lives, of rethinking the way in which we relate to each other, etc... in the last instance of putting our lives at the centre, of the importance of affection, of care... Debates about motherhood, about everything that has to do with our bodies and sexuality, about how we use our time, etc, etc, etc. These reflections may have postmodern drifts (with the consequent strategic loss), but on other occasions they contribute to placing in the centre issues that have been present but not central in feminism, and generally absent from the rest of the social and political movements.

New concerns also arise insofar as new subjects have burst onto the social and political scene, such as the trans movement, and are claiming their space. It is not that they did not exist before, it is that today they have a greater political visibility achieved by their own trajectory as a movement.

There is also a concern to incorporate and give visibility to women who have not had a visible role, incorporating the racial/ethnic issue alongside identity and/or sexual orientation, as well as other issues such as disability, mental illness, elderly, rural vs. city, etc.

3.4 New methods of struggle - feminist strike

The feminist strike appears as the new method of struggle of this cycle of mobilizations, not only for its articulating power but fundamentally for what it implies of questioning and broadening the strike as a tool of struggle. The feminist strike breaks the division between the productive and the

reproductive, pointing out the connections between the two, and putting the emphasis especially on the reproductive sphere as a strategy to put life at the centre.

The classic strike has never been free of the reproductive aspect: to maintain a strike you need provisions, in an insurrectionary general strike you need to articulate mechanisms of supply, of reproduction of life, of organizing life in another way. Lengthy struggles such as the British 1984-5 miner's strike, which also saw the self-organisation of women from those communities to support the strike, do partially reveal many of these issues. That potential of the strike to build an alternative power, to constitute a parallel society with forms of organization of the workers in each and every one of the spheres of life, has much of that dimension of reproduction. However, it has never been recognized as such.

The feminist strike is rethinking the strike as a tool incorporating not only what until now was invisible but also putting on the table what has been elaborated by the feminist movement. The initiative of the International Women's Strike in 2017 meant a new proposal for international articulation, although women are not organized around the strike proposal in all the different contexts. The new rise of women's mobilization has very diverse organizational expressions, in some countries with a strong rooting with the demands and struggles of indigenous communities and nationalities.

3.5 New theoretical understandings (theory of social reproduction, ecofeminism)

The contributions of ecofeminism and feminist economics theorize how capital clashes with life and how from feminism, reorganizing times and jobs, it is possible to break with that logic and question the system (or set of systems of oppression), proposing another way of relating to nature and satisfying our vital needs.

Work, times, body and territory/nature come to be the central elements of the theories that are currently being elaborated that start from what has been learned from being in the front row of suffering neoliberal attacks (precarization of life, privatizations, environmental depredation...) and from a theoretical effort to extend the critique of capitalism, to the accumulation of capital, to the reproductive dimension, etc.

4. What is its strategic importance?

In recent years there has been a substantial change in the role of the international women's movement. At present it can no longer be understood only as a sectoral issue (demands and proposals that affect a specific part of the population) but there is an attempt to express a certain totality. As feminists and Marxists we need to analyse this change, give it the right importance and readjust our strategic understanding of the feminist movement.

4.1 Leading resistance of the class as a whole, e.g. anti-Trump in the USA, anti-Bolsonaro in Brazil. Also teachers' strikes in the U.S., processes in Algeria and Sudan.

As discussed elsewhere in this document, the new feminist movement emerges in a context of a strong crisis of social reproduction. We know how the economic and financial panic of 2007-08 served as an excuse to deploy a whole series of measures focused on the recovery of the rate of profit through the socialization of the risks of the accumulation process (socialization of losses through the state purchase of private debt, among other mechanisms) and the re-privatization of the risks of the process of sustainability of life: cuts in social aid, privatization of important parts of the health systems and care for dependency, increase in school fees, generalized increase in the price of life, and so on.

The immediate consequences of this double process are twofold: the generalization and aggravation of precarious living conditions, which affect more and more people, and in more severe situations, reducing the margin between precariousness and exclusion; and the appearance of a crisis of social reproduction in the countries of the global North similar to that which already existed in the countries of the South, linked to a phenomenon of "peripheralization of the centre". It is women who have endured the crisis and woven the safety nets of last resort, in many cases at the cost of their own exhaustion and the lifelong limitation of their opportunities to develop as full and autonomous beings. It is on these margins, in the spaces linked to social reproduction and the increasingly precarious sustainability of life, that the main battles are currently taking place and a new cycle of struggles is being articulated.

We speak, therefore, not only of a rise of the feminist movement, but also of a phenomenon of "feminization of protest". Broadly speaking, there are five fields in which women are leading and leading the struggles and fightbacks: for public services (and, in Europe, against the dismantling of welfare states); for decent housing; for food

sovereignty and for the right to territory (which have intersected in recent months with the new movements for climate justice and against extractivism); for the improvement of working conditions and the obtaining of rights in what until now were the “margins of the labour market” but which in the current phase of capitalist crisis are expanding and constituting more and more the norm (precarious sectors, informal, zero hours, geographically displaced, etc.), as well as in reproductive jobs; and resistances to the new neoliberalisms.

The consequences of this happening alongside the consolidation of the feminist movement as a fundamental mobilizing vector in many countries, capable of bursting forth in moments of strong ebb and dissolution of social ties bearing profoundly anti-capitalist implications, are multiple. One of the main ones is that the dynamics of permanent mobilization and networking have turned feminism into a school of activist formation for many women, who quickly become politicized and can intervene in other fields, generating feminine references and strong women who exercise diverse models of leadership. On the other hand, it is worth highlighting the articulation of concrete demands and struggles that are not strictly feminist but much more global: against borders as spaces for systematic humanitarian massacres, against the destruction of land by industrial farming, particularly of livestock, and extractivist multinationals, in defence of civil liberties against extreme right-wing or authoritarian governments, of response and resistance to structural adjustment policies, and so on. The programme of the international women's strike in the different countries gives a good idea of this.

4.2 Does it lead us to reconsider our strategic understanding of the role of the women's movement?

We agree with the intuition, increasingly widespread within the women's movement, that feminist perspectives are a privileged point of view for analysing conditions of contemporary exploitation. We might add that they also constitute a privileged point of view for experimenting with new forms of organization and struggle. What is certain is that everything analysed so far has important strategic consequences. Thus, we maintain that feminist strikes and women's strikes can be considered a central experience in thinking about the organization, not only of women, but of the bulk of the working class. And on the other hand, the way in which feminist mobilizations for the right to abortion or against feminicide and macho violence

are being articulated opens up a whole field of direct confrontation with the class state and its institutions: Justice, the Army, and so on.

The feminist movement is allowing a process of democratization of the strike tool that is likely to have long-term consequence: breaking with the monopoly of trade union bureaucracies on the legitimacy of calling strikes. The 8 March mobilizations of the last two years have allowed a non-negligible layer of workers to organize a strike, in many cases for the first time in their lives. Self-confidence, empowerment, accumulated experience and the networks established by thousands of women can mean a qualitative leap for the whole class that can only be evaluated with the passage of time. The other element of democratization is the organization of the strike in sectors traditionally forgotten by the unionism of concertation, such as care or consumption, which nevertheless were important in the labour movement of the beginning of the 20th century: the strikes for the high cost of living or the rents are a good example. In this sense, the democratization of the strike allows us to experience this tool on the margins of the labour market that we mentioned earlier, and reinforces the idea that these activities are also and above all work.

The use of the strike tool, the centrality of the struggles for social reproduction, the aspiration to understand the processes of production and reproduction as an integrated whole, and its functioning as a vector of politicization and radicalization of the masses, make this new feminist movement itself a process of class subjectivation (becoming a class for itself). On a global scale, the feminist movement is redefining antagonisms and becoming a feminist class struggle. The potential of women to fulfil this role in the current historical moment does not depend on any essential identity, but starts from our role in the process of social reproduction, which makes our interests coincide with the interests of humanity.

This does not mean that until now feminism has not been related to the class struggle, nor that Marxism and feminism have become one single thing, nullifying the autonomy of the latter. Rather, in the current context of capitalist crisis, historically concrete forms of reproduction of capital contradict the social sustainability of life in more and more regions of the world and are incompatible with basic feminist demands, making any feminist consciousness end up confronting the pillars of capitalist accumulation.

Reflecting on how feminism is allowing the rediscovery of slogans such as the distribution of jobs -this time in plural, the drastic reduction of the working day linked to the socialization of reproductive work, rethinking which jobs are socially necessary, but also which economic activities should cease because they are destructive for people or the planet, etc., is one of the strategic challenges of the moment. In the face of capitalist irrationality and the waste of resources and human energy that it generates, we must propose a reorganization of the work in an ecosocial and feminist direction. This is a fundamental task in the phase we are in. The processes of accumulation and the crisis of neoliberal governance have opened a new, virulent, and in many cases violent, cycle that seeks to redefine the mechanisms of exploitation, domination and oppression. Disputing that redefinition will be key to its outcome.

5. What is our orientation and our tasks within the movement?

We stand for building a broad mass inclusive movement and fight to preserve the broadest possible unity; however this does not imply we do not fight for a political orientation for the movement.

5.1 Demands that address the needs of the most oppressed/exploited while building unity between (a) the broadest women's resistance against the right, (b) feminism for the 99% (women's strikes etc.) and (c) revolutionaries.

While the fundamental demands for women's rights are in the interests of all women, ensuring that they become a reality for all women means that we have to pay attention to demands for the necessary funding and resources so that they become a reality even for the most deprived and marginalized women. Thus, while we fight for example to win legal gains concerning the right to abortion or for justice for women victims of violence, we have to also fight for resources for the health, legal and counselling services that help women access these. We also have to fight for non-discriminatory right to access such services, without any discrimination against women for reasons of legal status, resources, ethnic or migrant background, sexuality or gender identity.

We thus fight to ensure that demands that come from the most marginalized groups are championed by the movement as a whole, as well as opposing discriminatory behaviour within the movement itself.

At the same time we fight to demonstrate in practice that the current system is incapable of truly satisfying women's demands so that women's organizing is an ongoing process of politicization and radicalization.

5.2 Mass self-organized action

This process of politicization and radicalization is also strengthened by the experience of grassroots self-organization, whether in the neighbourhoods, the rural areas, the workplaces or places of study. We therefore place the emphasis on collective action, organized by those concerned. When campaigns are launched by small groups or collectives of feminist women, we fight to turn them towards the mass of women in the neighbourhoods, the workplaces etc by popularizing demands using appropriate means to reach out (leaflets, street theatre, flash mobs, open discussions, petitions, social media) and proposing actions (pickets, demonstrations etc) that are open to and encourage participation from all women. Where contact with institutions is necessary, we fight for representatives to be democratically chosen and for them to be accountable through reporting back in a democratic forum to the women involved.

The proposal of the feminist/women's strike enables such an orientation of mass action to address all women, those in the workplaces, in the informal sector, at home, by touching on all aspects of women's lives in both productive and reproductive work. We call on men to support the women's strike, by assuming – at least for 8 March – the invisible care work so that their partners, friends and colleagues will not be limited in their participation to all the actions planned during that day.

In workplaces to limit the strike call only to women would be to limit its impact and exclude large number of women, thus in workplaces we call on men to support women by participating in the strike. As revolutionary Marxists we also explain, and hope to show in practice, the weight of collective action in workplaces in the fight to build a favourable relationship of forces.

5.3 Importance of international coordination

In a world where our opponents – the capitalist system, the rising authoritarian, far right and fundamentalist forces, the multinational climate destroyers – are internationally organized, the

women's movement too must build and strengthen its international links.

The lack of structural organization, while a strength of a radical movement, makes international coordination – requiring as it does money and resources – difficult to achieve, thus building a real international coordination between the radical and self-organized movements developing today remains a task to be achieved. As an international current we should be in the forefront of building links and promoting all opportunities for international coordination.

5.4. Intersection (articulation) with other social movements

We must not fall into the trap of making a catalogue of movements as if the women's movement is separate and unconnected from the workers' movement, the climate movement, the peace movement, the revolutionary processes underway in Algeria and Sudan, movements against racism and more. Women are in the forefront of these movements and within them are raising the question of the place of women in them - for example challenging the sexual violence used against women.

It is necessary in the women's movement as well as in all other movements to build links between all those who share the same aspiration: to change society so that it is organized in the interest of the many and not the few. This means pointing out how climate change, how racist and migrant policies, how imperialist wars, how austerity policies, how denial of democratic and workers' rights, all affect women in particular and particularly severe ways and seeking to engage the women's movement, or sections of it, in their actions.

It also means fighting in other movements, and in particular the organized workers' movement, that women's specific demands are also demands of those movements.

6. Our internal tasks

Women's liberation work is not simply a sector of work in itself but something that must influence every other area of our work and our entire organization.

Although we can legitimately claim to have been in the forefront of revolutionary Marxists in taking women's questions seriously – starting from our 1979 resolution, our 1991 resolutions including on women in the party, and subsequent contributions –

this has been the result very often of a very voluntarist effort by a small number of comrades.

Our women's work must continue to be organized on an international basis combining regional (continental) coordination with international coordination and a strong link with the international leadership bodies – through the IC Women's Commission, regular women's seminars and other appropriate forms. This must reflect organized work at national level.

Our history has shown us that without specific bodies to organize our women's work it tends to decline alongside the decline of the strength of the movement. Our commitment to the importance of women's liberation in a programme for a socialist future has to be matched by our commitment to continue political activity and education within our own ranks on the question.

1991 WORLD CONGRESS

Positive action and partybuilding among women

[...]

What other measures should a positive action plan include?

The development of a policy of positive action means the development of a general policy and not of isolated measures. A general policy to fight against the "natural" dynamic of exclusion. In that sense, it is obviously artificial since the "natural" means the exclusion of women. Here we can say that the first condition lies with changing the balance of forces. To this aim we need not only to develop a general programmatic and political integration but also to develop a conscious policy to change our functioning, to ensure a fundamental policy of integration of women in the leadership and leadership tasks. We, women and men in political parties have known for a long time that real changes do not occur if there are no changes in the leaderships.

Added to this it is fundamental for the building of the strength of women to be able to organise internally in all the ways necessary to the

various objectives of building our strength: in numerical terms, in terms of the organizational conditions, of the development of solidarity amongst women. Implementation of only one measure, whichever it is, as the solution to the problem, has a limited effect.

However, it is important to give some ideas on possible measures to be included in such a policy:

Organizing our feminist work

i. Creating and/or strengthening women's commissions in the sections.

ii. Strengthening bodies that exist to organise the women's liberation work in the International and encouraging regional organizing among women in the FI.

iii. Regularly discussing women's liberation work on leading bodies and taking collective responsibility for any problems that arise. Disagreements and differences among women will emerge and should not be viewed as unhealthy. They do not have to be hidden from the organization as a whole.

iv. Inviting members of women's commissions to discussions of the leadership if they are not members of the relevant body.

Education

i. Placing a high priority on education, debate and analysis of women's liberation issues for all members and ensuring that some understanding of these issues is central to the criteria for recruitment.

ii. Organising educational events in which women play an equal or majority role. Ensuring that styles of delivery are not so traditional that they discourage women and less experienced comrades from participating.

iii. The European schools/extended fraction meetings have been relatively successful given the small resources put into building them and because they bring together comrades who have

experience in organising over a long period with younger comrades who are today leading the youth organizations.

iv. The educational aspect of the Latin American fraction meetings has been important in developing a common understanding between the comrades of a certain number of theoretical and political questions. This type of initiative should continue in these two regions and be extended to others when possible.

v. The first international FI women's seminar was successful. We must ensure that the second is equally so.

Party image and profile

i. Ensuring the press has articles by and about women - and covers issues of particular concern to women. Pamphlets and other publications need to have a feminist profile.

ii. Ensuring that we have recruitment campaigns aimed at women.

Leadership

i. Ensuring that women are visible as leaders of the organization.

ii. Encouraging the development of young women as political leaders in the youth organizations and sections.

iii. Taking time to train women in branches and national leadership responsibilities so that they feel competent in the tasks they perform.

iv. Not overburdening a small number of women with so many tasks that they become "burnt out" and are forced to withdraw from activity.

v. Making knowledge of, and interest in, questions of women's liberation a criteria for participation in the leadership.

General behaviour and functioning

i. Having a code of practice that specifically outlaws forms of sexual intimidation and violence.

- ii. Avoiding sexist language and jokes.
- iii. Organising meetings that allow for maximum participation through adequate preparation of chairing and speaking procedures that ensure equal rights to all participants.
- iv. Taking account of the problems of parents with children in planning national and local events.
- v. There is a need to place a higher value on developing a convivial atmosphere in our political activity, eg having socials at political events.

Self-organization and democratic centralism

In relaunching the debate on this question we have to be clear about the parameters of a revolutionary organization. It is impossible to liberate women without overthrowing the private property relations which reproduce women's subordination in society. Membership in a revolutionary organization is conditioned by this understanding. No one particular form of organization can end the oppression of women.

Many comrades use this objective limitation to argue that "not much can be done, women cannot be liberated without changing the social structures and making the revolution." We must reject categorically this type of reasoning as being conservative and reactionary.

Revolutionary Marxist organizations, understanding material limitations, must adopt an attitude of creating all the counter-tendencies possible today to existing oppression. We do this in relation to the limits of the workers' movement and racial oppression. It also has to be done as regards women's oppression.

But revolutionary organizations can take steps to reach out to women on their terms, look at their political experiences and adjust their own functioning to make them as women-friendly as possible. Women's fractions, commissions and organizers can help push this process forward.

In general the most positive experiences and the most political discussions take place where the leadership through the CC or the Women's Commission has structured these discussions. The idea of special women's meetings to discuss political questions relevant to women and to which all women in the organization are invited to attend, can be a good model to promote the self-organization of women.

Criteria for leadership

The leadership question is one important aspect of the positive action debate. If approached without an overall plan it will not address the problems of women throughout the organization. We have to have objective criteria for leadership that guarantee a real change in the composition and functioning of leaderships. Just as political continuity is a factor in leadership selection, so is working in a collective team, taking the lead in developing key areas of work, having earned the political confidence of rank-and-file activists and comrades. When a leadership constantly under-represents the number of women in the whole organization it is a sign that the body itself is somewhat dysfunctional. We should aim for parity where possible but this should not be a rigid, inflexible schema because women do not wish to reverse roles but to transform the workings of the party. Where parity is not possible we should adopt targets to increase women's representation in relevant leadership bodies.

One suggestion for helping to integrate new women onto leadership bodies is that they should be given time to learn their new tasks and an opportunity to identify practices in the organization they think need changing. This is best facilitated by women's commissions, fractions or a specific caucus meeting that can help to identify such areas and organize report-backs to the relevant leadership bodies. Leadership bodies need to be held accountable for the organization as a whole.

Conclusion

The aim of this document is to restart the debate on positive action. In a sense, it comes ten years after it should have been written. But it is not too late to crystallise organizational as well as political gains out of an important period of women's radicalization, backed up by the self-organization of women and promoted by the leadership.

The women's movement does not have the institutional expression of the trade unions. We have tried to create structures and an understanding inside our sections and the International so that revolutionary continuity on the problems of women are not lost or abandoned. In some countries the women's movement has faced a downturn. But the lessons are not lost for that country or internationally if the gains of modern feminism are fully reflected in both our programme and our practice. It is only by working through the proposals in all the sections that we will be able to make an international balance sheet on this question.

It is worth restating the positive nature of the policy which has been developed in the recent years by the FI. A series of important measures have been applied, which are not however sufficient. The central challenge which remains is that of obtaining this type of policy in a more complete way inside the sections. By taking such special measures, within the framework of unifying the party as a whole, we will not only counter any philistinism among communists, but win and keep more women in our ranks. This is central to ensuring that the political projects of our organizations are collective projects of women and men.

**THE TYRANNY of
STRUCTURELESSNESS**
by Jo Freeman aka Joreen

[...]

PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURING

Once the movement no longer clings tenaciously to the ideology of "structurelessness," it is free to develop those forms of organization best suited to its healthy functioning. This does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and blindly imitate the traditional forms of organization. But neither should we blindly reject them all. Some of the traditional techniques will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should and should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs to the individuals in the movement. Mostly, we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations. The Lot System is one such idea which has emerged from the movement. It is not applicable to all situations, but is useful in some. Other ideas for structuring are needed. But before we can proceed to experiment intelligently, we must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself -- only its excess use.

While engaging in this trial-and-error process, there are some principles we can keep in mind that are essential to democratic structuring and are also politically effective:

- 1) Delegation of specific authority to specific individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures. Letting people assume jobs or tasks only by default means they are not dependably done. If people are selected to do a task,

preferably after expressing an interest or willingness to do it, they have made a commitment which cannot so easily be ignored.

2) Requiring all those to whom authority has been delegated to be responsible to those who selected them. This is how the group has control over people in positions of authority. Individuals may exercise power, but it is the group that has ultimate say over how the power is exercised.

3) Distribution of authority among as many people as is reasonably possible. This prevents monopoly of power and requires those in positions of authority to consult with many others in the process of exercising it. It also gives many people the opportunity to have responsibility for specific tasks and thereby to learn different skills.

4) Rotation of tasks among individuals. Responsibilities which are held too long by one person, formally or informally, come to be seen as that person's "property" and are not easily relinquished or controlled by the group. Conversely, if tasks are rotated too frequently the individual does not have time to learn her job well and acquire the sense of satisfaction of doing a good job.

5) Allocation of tasks along rational criteria. Selecting someone for a position because they are liked by the group or giving them hard work because they are disliked serves neither the group nor the person in the long run. Ability, interest, and responsibility have got to be the major concerns in such selection. People should be given an opportunity to learn skills they do not have, but this is best done through some sort of "apprenticeship" program rather than the "sink or swim" method. Having a responsibility one can't handle well is demoralizing. Conversely, being blacklisted from doing what one can do well does not encourage one to develop one's skills. Women have been punished for being competent throughout most

of human history; the movement does not need to repeat this process.

6) Diffusion of information to everyone as frequently as possible. Information is power. Access to information enhances one's power. When an informal network spreads new ideas and information among themselves outside the group, they are already engaged in the process of forming an opinion -- without the group participating. The more one knows about how things work and what is happening, the more politically effective one can be.

7) Equal access to resources needed by the group. This is not always perfectly possible, but should be striven for. A member who maintains a monopoly over a needed resource (like a printing press owned by a husband, or a darkroom) can unduly influence the use of that resource. Skills and information are also resources. Members' skills can be equitably available only when members are willing to teach what they know to others.

When these principles are applied, they insure that whatever structures are developed by different movement groups will be controlled by and responsible to the group. The group of people in positions of authority will be diffuse, flexible, open, and temporary. They will not be in such an easy position to institutionalize their power because ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large. The group will have the power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.

"Sanction policies in a feminist party"

Resolution of the 6th National Congress of the PRT (Mexican Section of the 4th International), 1989

The following criteria of internal sanctions in

the party, in regard to oppression of women, were approved at the VI National Congress, held from the 1st to the 5th of November in Mexico

The present document is a contribution from the PRT Women's Commission to the thinking about a sanctions policy in relation to women's oppression. We thought it was especially important to start the thinking in writing now, since we decided at our last congress to initiate new efforts to make this a feminist party. We believe that, since our last congress, women militants have been feeling more confident about denouncing cases of aggression against them, which motivates us to make the following observations with an eye to continuing to deepening the discussion begun two years ago.

A party like ours, whose revolutionary principles include a feminist perspective, finds itself up against challenges and contradictions when trying to set norms and rules about internal functioning. When we join a revolutionary party we usually assume a certain world view, implicit in our principles, and that becomes an accepted common identity, establishing therefore in practice a social form of control between the members of the revolutionary party. This social control is found in our party norms and bylaws, and is enforced fundamentally by the control commission, and by all other party bodies. This is where sanctions come in to the picture. And this is why they are accepted by the militants as a necessity.

There are certain values that have historically been accepted by Marxists regarding a revolutionary activist's behaviour. Nevertheless, when confronted with feminist questioning, we have fewer common values, due to several reasons, including for instance, the youthfulness of the mass feminist movement (with respect to the revolutionary movement). The changes in behaviour and in values that feminism proposes are not accepted by society as a whole, nor by

all revolutionaries, because they are part of what has historically been considered as private. For that reason, creating norms for party life using feminist criteria is no easy task. We know that it is not a matter of giving recipes or models for life. The search for new men and women is just that: a search. We know that the total liberation of both men and women is not possible in the capitalist system, but precisely that is one of the contributions of our internationalist current, to recognize the necessity of struggling for change, starting today. We do not assume the cynical attitude that says "we can't change this today; it will change under socialism." Our revolutionary commitment is to fight for change starting today, however painful this process might be, and with all of its contradictions. After all, the lives of revolutionary men and women are not characterized by their comfort.

In our new revolutionary Marxist current, we have a conception of feminism as a movement that seeks profound change, the subversion of the established order. We do not limit ourselves to assuring women access to careers, professions, posts, rank, encouragement, resources, etc. Our feminist struggle is not simply for formal equality, but to revolutionize gender relations, as a whole, between men and women. It is for this reason that our feminist conception includes also the private sphere. Our purpose is to feminize both the public and the "private."

Women's oppression is expressed in a fundamental way in the private sphere. To us, the private sphere is not only the home and intra-family relationships, but fundamentally the whole aspect of male and female identity in which the relationships linked with gender domination are felt the most deeply and painfully. Centuries of training for both men and women are concentrated in the formation of the differing male and female identities. To change this is no easy task, but let us hope it does not take us yet again as many centuries.

We considered it necessary to start with these observations in order to put the complexity of women's oppression in that framework, and to call attention to the need deepen our understanding without using clichés about women's oppression and liberation. Also we think it's important to explain why we say that the party is not an island, neither men nor women militants can really liberate themselves individually or in groups. We live with the contradiction of fighting every day for a new world, against the current of the rest of society, as well as in relation to ourselves.

The greatest problem is that, regardless of the difficulties implied in our reality, we have to establish certain social, internal control in regards to gender relations. In this field we have taken several important steps forward, if we take into account the adverse context. Affirmative action, and minimum quotas in the leadership are two important measures towards building a feminist revolutionary party.

Nevertheless, there are other aspects of party building where it is more difficult to apply feminist criteria. Social control to protect women militants against aggression by male comrades is not commonly accepted. In other words, feminizing the public sphere (access for women to the leadership, delegates, etc.) is less problematic than feminizing the private sphere. The biggest problem is that that is where we find the worst of women's oppression.

We think that we, as militants of both sexes, have to make serious efforts to change our behaviour and our ideas, but this is obviously a long and sinuous process. In no way do we think it is a matter of finding the answers in recipe books or department manuals, and therefore neither do we believe that the establishing of sanctions would be a solution in itself to the problems of oppression. We don't like to reduce the issue to "crime and punishment" or exemplary punishments, nor do

we think that people learn by fear. But then, what do we do?

First of all we recognize the need for sanctions. The sanctions are necessary to preserve the party, and this includes the women. Minimum norms of respect are required among militants, minimal norms of interacting, which give women a place to act politically in our country, with certain confidence. We believe that these minimal norms can be listed in three categories: Violence (threats and blows), sexual violence (harassment and rape) and sexist verbal aggression (sexist remarks against comrades). Of course all of these categories can be broken down a bit more, and they require different levels and kinds of sanctions, but we consider them to be the minimum aspects around which each man and women in the PRT should establish rules for working together. If we fail to regulate these three aspects, women would be left completely unprotected in our life in the party. The sanctions are a defensive action so that we, as women can remain in the party with at least minimum conditions guaranteed.

Since we don't see this issue as a matter of crime and punishment, we know that, in order to minimize the aggressions against women within the party, it is necessary to do other things other than just to sanction. It is fundamentally a matter of ideological struggle, we are consciously trying to combat patriarchal ideology, its value system, its customs, etc. For this purpose, we need to seriously discuss in an organized way, the different aspects of gender oppression in relation to what is called private life: sexuality, subjectivity, maternity-paternity, etc.

The party can in no way regulate our militants' intimacy; we are not a police force to regulate the thinking and sentiments of our cadre. That is a practice of Stalinism and Nazism, which does not belong in our revolutionary Marxist conceptions. But it is obvious that, in order for us to really undertake the gender question, the

party must discuss personal and subjective questions, trying to establish equilibrium among three aspects: the objective conditions in the society, the respect for individuality each person's individual process, and the questioning of the private sphere, showing up its political and social nature. We also need to take into account the different levels of consciousness among militants in the party, so that we can situate our measures in the contradictory reality within the PRT.

This means that we need to integrate the discussion of these issues into the party life and into cadre education. We have to create materials and methods for the education appropriate for different levels, but most importantly, the leadership must make together with the women's commission must make a commitment to organize the discussion.

It is fundamental for the whole leadership to be involved, because the issue in question is to eradicate the notion that women's oppression a women's problem. The responsibility of feminizing the party belongs to us all. What is clear is that we as women require certain balance of forces so that the gender question can be present at all times. Obviously, for this to happen, we need to have an active women's movement in our country, but we also need to create discussion space for women where there is none, and where there is, we must strengthen it.

We don't want there to be just a few specialized feminists, but for all the women in the PRT to find a gender identity, and for that to happen, we need to discuss among us. The experience of Central Committee women is an important step forward, but we need to go deeper in our search for a better balance of forces.

We think that we will better our balance of forces and our self-confidence when we begin discussing our oppression as women in our base committees. Sometimes this is more effective than a sanction. We need to go much deeper in

our discussion regarding the different levels of consciousness inside and outside the party. It is important to discuss about how militants should act in the mass movement, and try to explain what we understand as militant feminist conduct in the mass movement, without being violently confrontational.

We have confidence in the PRT, just as we also trust that it is possible for the men and women within it to initiate a profound change. We want this VI Congress to mark one more step on the road we started to build at our last congress.

PRT Women's commission

Bandera Socialista No. 402, December 1989