

A call to all women of the world: Let's unite in the struggle for socialism so that we can 'breathe'!

It was only a few months before the outbreak of pandemic that many parts of the world experienced massive workers' movements and popular uprisings. Despite governments' attempts to suppress these upheavals with outrageous brutality, working people made clear that they would not be satisfied with a few reforms and expressed their wishes for radical change in government. In Iraq, Iran and Lebanon, women took their place in the frontlines of the protests against governments and their corruption as well as the increasing costs of living. In France, women and youth organized the most creative demonstrations against the proposed reforms in pensions. The demand for "a New Constitution, a Democratic Chile" has spread all around the world thanks to Chilean women who did not yield for a second to violence and rape of military powers. In India, masses of women raised their voices for a humane life and gender equality by participating in the largest strike in the country's history. In Latin America; in Argentina, Chile and Mexico, women who struggle for 'life' organized massive protests to protect their rights and lives by saying 'Not one less'. Recent years have witnessed the celebrations of 8th of March in widespread demonstrations by greater numbers of women in all around the world, which shows how women dedicated to their struggles.

During the last couple of years, the world has also witnessed widespread strikes and resistances, especially in healthcare and social services. This mobilization has emerged and grown in response to the effects of austerity policies and oppressive working conditions imposed by capital for a long time, which are more visible today than ever. The pandemic revealed the fact that the neoliberal transformation in healthcare and social services has become a "murder weapon" in the hands of capital. The greatest impact of this transformation is on women. Therefore, women workers who make up a large proportion of these sectors have been the most resistant part of this mobilization.

Rising rage of the world's women unveiled the connection between the neoliberal policies of the last 10 years –an expression of the murderous nature of capitalism– and violence against women; between increasing poverty and poor living and working conditions forced on women; between the rise of authoritarian regimes and attacks on women's rights. Therefore, the inequalities and violence experienced by women have been necessarily linked to the struggle against capitalism. Masses of women have come together in an uncompromising struggle against violence and abuse as well as in strikes, resistances, and street protests.

Surely, each of these movements was a manifestation of a fundamental challenge against the brutality of capitalist exploitation. And the subsequent response of the bourgeois class to COVID-19 pandemic justified once again the anger of working people, especially women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HIT THE PEAK DURING THE PANDEMIC

Eager to utilize the pandemic in imperialistic competition, western capitalism totally ignored all the warnings raised by scientists in recent years. It launched the fight on the pandemic only when it became a threat to western capitalism itself. So, it jeopardized the health of millions and caused the death of hundreds of thousands of people. None of these belated measures aimed to protect human life, they were to save capital and ensure its reproduction as in all crises. Capitalists and their governments found widespread testing and tracking too expensive that they abandoned the working classes to herd immunity while putting lockdown in place regardless of its consequences for women.

Lockdown in the household meant a multiplication of domestic burden on women's shoulders, more deaths and more exposure to violence. Although there is no clear data, in April during which more than half of the world's population was under lockdown, the cases of violence against women rose by 30 per cent in many countries. In some countries, on the other hand, non-governmental organizations providing support for women who suffered from violence draw attention to a considerable decrease in the number of calls for help because of the lack of access to necessary technology. Furthermore, full or partial shutdown of women's shelters, delays or cancellation of ongoing court proceedings, release of convicted abusers from jails due to the lockdown and so-called pandemic measures have trapped women into a hell of violence.

It was not the case that international capitalism was unable to foresee all these consequences. All the data drafted by its affiliated non-governmental organizations were showing the costs of this lockdown. They were well aware that one in three women around the world are being killed by a previous or current partner. According to UN WOMEN, 243 million women and girls aged between 15 and 49 were sexually or physically attacked in the last 12 months from July 2018 to July 2019. In one in four countries all around the world, there are no laws specifically to protect women from domestic violence. Less than 40 percent of women who suffer from violence report it, less than 10 per cent call for help from the police.

PANDEMIC AND AFTER: EXPLOITATION, MORE EXPLOITATION

Violence against women takes place not only in homes but also in the so-called frontline of the fight on pandemic. Women, who constitute 70 percent of 136 million workers in healthcare and social work all around the world, express a significant rise in violence at workplaces. All the measures taken today for the sake of the reproduction of capital in the post-pandemic world mean nothing but unemployment, poverty and informal work for millions of working women. Especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, informal workers who produce goods and services for international monopolies have already lost their earnings by 80 per cent while the number of workers in poverty has quadrupled. Women workers have been either laid off or forced to take unpaid leave because monopolies of fashion and food supply have stopped their orders which led to closure of workplaces. Tens of thousands of women who were unable to go back their homes were trapped in cities, made vulnerable in face of the pandemic, and doomed to hunger.

The 'stay home' calls meant nothing for workers who have been obliged to work. In the workplaces where there is no measures taken for infection, social distancing is impossible, no protective equipment was provided for workers' health, they were abandoned to the dilemma of 'either virus or hunger'. These are the same workplaces where women are seen as 'secondary labour' due to the sexist practices and patriarchal codes. With the pandemic, the sexist practices were deepened and the violence at workplaces has increased.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFORMALITY HIT WOMEN HARDEST

In the highest-hit sectors (accommodation and food services; real estate, business and administrative activities; manufacture; wholesale and retail trade) where 1,25 billion workers work globally, the share of women in employment changes from 38 to 54 per cent. Millions of women workers in these sectors have already participated in the reserved army of the unemployed. Institutions aligned to capitalism themselves confessed that an estimated 25 million will be added to last year's figure of narrow unemployment (188 million), which is higher than the increase following the 2008-9 crisis (22 million). It has already become clear that unemployment hits women hardest, especially young women. In the US, the epicenter of imperialist-capitalist aggression, the unemployment rate of young women rose from 7.5 to 29.8 percent only in March and April.

Women workers in the informal sectors are among those who were most affected sectors of society. The irregularities increased while working conditions has become wilder in informal working where migrant workers constitute a great proportion. Migrant women workers were fully deprived of any opportunities to hold onto their lives, survive and build a future for themselves and their families.

The fact that mandatory working time increased to 12 hours per day in India, where informal employment rate was already 90 per cent has shown what capitalism's 'new normal' would be in the post-pandemic era, which is nothing but more exploitation of workers, particularly working women.

In such a period during which people were taken away from humane working conditions because of deepening exploitation, more decrease in wages and worsening insecurity, especially poor working women became much more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. In addition to inhumane and hard-working conditions, the pandemic has replicated the household burden and made all the problems faced by women much deeper.

RAGE AGAINST CAPITALIST AGGRESSION IS GROWING

There is no doubt that working people and women from different sectors of society are responding to the brutal face of capitalism all around the world. In Asia and Latin America, thousands of women who were doomed to unemployment and hunger organized or joined protests even during the pandemic. Moreover, the pre-pandemic popular uprisings and protests resumed in Lebanon and India, with more being added as the protests against racism and poverty started in the US and spread over many parts of the world. The atrocity of Floyd's murder released the rage that people already felt as a result of the effects of the problems caused by capitalism that were

intensified during the pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic left women with old and new problems burdened on their shoulders in their countries, cities, streets and homes. But it also made the source of all these problems more visible and sharper than ever: The "normal" of capitalism is slavery for women. And misogyny exists in the very nature of capitalism itself. This is what the pandemic made self-evident now.

Under the brutal conditions of neoliberal capitalism, women's will to protect their lives and have a decent life turned into a life-or-death struggle. With the current pandemic, the 'women friendly' mask of capitalism has fallen and its misogynist face has become apparent.

Political powers and mentalities that are willing to subordinate women utilized the pandemic to speed up their plans to attack on women's rights. While they attempted to take women's right to political representation back, make restrictions on right to abortion, suspend the laws and conventions ensuring the mechanisms of protection from violence, and increase the repression on women's organizations, it became of a vital importance to say "We don't give up our lives and rights."

LET'S UNITE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM AND DESTROY MYSOGYNISTIC CAPITALISM!

Today, all preparations of capitalism for the "new normal" are accompanied with more exploitation of women's labor and bodies, as well as the exacerbation of slavery conditions. Using their capacity to conceal the effects of crises, governments confront us with a number of practices varying from the use of public funds to suppress possible objections to thickening the sticks of oppressive regimes. Jobs, rights and the futures of millions of women are at risk. It is the course of class struggle that will determine what will happen in the "new normal" period during which we will face a new wave of massive unemployment, deterioration of social rights, forcing down of wages to drive up profit rates, and increasing pressures on labor power.

Women from all around the world, with different languages, beliefs, and colors are experiencing common consequences imposed by the capitalist system which tries to take possession of their labor and bodies. People, the oppressed, the exploited classes, and women from different countries influence each other in finding ways out of this process. Women raising their voice in Latin America resonates with their sisters in Africa; the rising rage in the US inspires the people in Europe; and the emerging struggles in the Middle East build up the strength to change in Asia. Working women of the world know that capitalism cannot bring any "good", "welfare", "prosperity", nor can it promise a fresh breath of air. The world cannot breathe! In order to be able to breathe, we cannot rely on capitalism's promise of "equal opportunity" which has never been fulfilled; we need to destroy this system of exploitation which is the very basis of women's oppression.

Socialism is the only way to breathe against everything that chokes women, i.e. violence, insecurity in the world of work, unequal pay, economic crises, wars, homophobia, xenophobic immigration policies, colonialization, destruction of nature, and neoliberalism!

Let's strengthen our unity and solidarity, and struggle to clear our way to breathe!

For women to organize and struggle together for all our rights; from right to education to right to healthcare, from right to housing to stopping ecological destruction, from the struggle against violence to the protection and improvement of right to equality, from better working conditions to right to equal pay, from equal civil rights to right to equal political representation, let's raise our voice together for all of our demands to unite and strengthen women's struggle for equality in all areas of life!

CIPOML Coordination Committee