

Feminist and LGBTQI+ struggles today

Introduction

1. The 20th and 21st centuries are full of important feminist and LGBTQI+ struggles. Women had to fight hard for civic rights, equal pay, reproductive rights and against violence. LGBTQI+ people had to fight for equality to marriage, to healthcare, recognition of “existence” and free expression. On many occasions the establishment had to step back faced with their determined mass struggles and introduce reforms to satisfy some of their demands.
2. Since 2015 feminist movements came again to the forefront of struggle, with massive protests globally and by adopting methods of struggle characteristic of the working class – i.e. mass protests, demonstrations and strikes.
3. The great “ni una menos” (“not one less”) movement against femicides was launched in Argentina in 2015, while the first women’s strike was organized in Poland in 2016, which developed into an international strike in 2017, followed by a call for a feminist strike in Spain in 2018. At the same time, in January 2017, at the time of Trump’s inauguration in the US, millions of women came to the streets not only in the US but also internationally, against the sexist, misogynist attitudes that Trump represented and promoted.
4. LGBTQI+ people have won in many countries the right to wed while in many countries their movements have succeeded in legalizing the right to transition and identity change. However, even at places where these are won, there still many reasons for LGBTQI+ people to continue struggling.
5. The new conservatism spread in ruling elites in the US, Europe and internationally signifies a revival of the attacks on women and LGBTQI+ rights. Attacking women’s rights and a return to “traditional family” values are high on the agendas of the right wing, populist and far right governments. These traditional family values actually mean that women would go back to the traditional oppressive reproductive roles, without having any choice on their body or their life. At the same time the rights of LGBTQI+ people are regarded as a danger to the traditional family. Women and LGBTQI+ people are faced with new challenges.
6. The need for proper organization and a mass response with clear demands of a class character is necessary and urgent. As Marxists, members of Internationalist Standpoint, we are involved and participate in women’s and LGBTQI+ struggles, pointing out the importance of the necessary system change towards a socialist society without oppression and discrimination.

The uprising in Iran

7. Women in Iran have not had control over their bodies and lives, particularly since the 1979 revolution, when the theocratic regime took over. This reality had gradually prepared the conditions for anger to explode against the violence, discrimination and oppression suffered by women, despite the savage, authoritarian character of the regime. Over the past few years, protests against the headscarf and the violation of basic human rights had been on the rise.
8. Furthermore, the last decade has been marked by massive protests and mobilisations against poverty, price hikes, anti-worker policies and the corrupt political system. Thus, the uprising that followed the

murder of Masha Amini on September 22, for not wearing her headscarf properly, touched mass layers of the population who protested not only against the oppression of women, but also against police repression, worsening living conditions, lack of basic democratic rights, exploitation and poverty etc. The mass protests were followed by local and sectoral strikes, and the dominant slogan of mobilization was the overthrow of the religious regime. This uprising also reminded us, once again, of how intertwined the oppression of women and the exploitation of the working class are and how important it is that they support and inspire each other.

9. Women are often at the forefront of social struggles. It was the case in the Russian revolution of 1917, and the Spanish Revolution in 1936, as well as in many recent struggles, such as in Egypt during the “Arab Spring”, in Sudan, Chile in 2019 or in Poland in 2020. The double oppression they suffer from (class and gender), often leads them to revolt and makes them more conscious of the necessity of fighting together with the other oppressed social groups and the working class as a whole.

[The right of abortion under attack \['\]](#)

10. Around the world, access to safe and legal abortions varies. We have seen some victories in recent years, often after fierce struggles, but at the same time we have also seen that abortion rights are among the first to be attacked by conservative political forces.
11. In Latin America, there were important victories won in Argentina in 2020 and in Colombia in 2022. These victories should be celebrated, particularly given the widespread ban on abortions across the region.
12. While celebrating these victories, the movement must also point to their limitations and continue the fight for free, safe, and legal abortion that is genuinely accessible to all – regardless of their social and financial situation. Access to and funding for childcare and specialised healthcare, as well as welfare payments to support those who choose to have children must be part of the broader struggle for reproductive rights.
13. The fight to win abortion rights in other countries will be an important factor in strengthening these new reforms imposed by the movements. We have seen that under capitalism, even reforms that were won decades ago can be taken away. This was starkly illustrated in North America in 2022. The Supreme Court of the USA voted to overturn the historic “*Roe v. Wade*” precedent which had paved the way for abortion rights across the country. This led to immediate ban on abortions in numerous states.
14. The nature of conservative forces varies, but their underpinning ideology is rooted in upholding the patriarchal system of capitalism. This ideology stands in contrast to the socialist belief that a hallmark of a fair and just society is valuing the right of women and those who can become pregnant to choose if, how and when they have children. In fact, the first modern state to legalise abortion was the Soviet Union after the 1917 Russian Revolution.
15. Generally, the rights of women and those who can become pregnant are attacked by conservative forces before larger attacks on the broader working class are attempted. We can see that the fight for reproductive rights is part of the fight for a different kind of society – a socialist one.

[Neoliberalism and the pandemic take women’s rights decades back](#)

16. Women represent a massive proportion of the global working class, they are the majority of the teachers and nurses, the majority of the precarious and informal jobs, and perform the overwhelming majority of unpaid care work at home.

17. Within the household women produce and reproduce the unique commodity for capitalism, labour power. Through unpaid work at home, women not only take care of the daily reproduction of labour power but they also raise the future working class. The household is a micro-factory, it is the beginning of the capitalist assembly line where women produce and reproduce workers. Women are facing violence within the first chain of the assembly line; therefore, all the socialist and working-class organisations should put the struggle against domestic violence at the centre of their political agenda. This is why basic rights such as the freedom to decide about one's own body, to decide on motherhood and to live under secure conditions (especially within the household) are rights for which the entire working class and socialist organisations have to fight for.
18. Similarly, the precariousness of work, the lack of funds for health and education, the extension of the working day, which make the double burden of housework and paid work unbearable, all these attacks on the working class have to be central demands of the feminist movement.
19. Under neoliberalism, as the state's role in provision of social reproduction services (such as health, education, housing etc.) has been further dismantled, households which can afford started to buy those services on the market, whereas within the working-class households, women substitute the lack of those services with their unpaid care work.
20. With the pandemic, the exploitation of women's invisible/unpaid care work has reached unprecedented degrees. Education and childcare institutions were closed for long periods; access to healthcare services for the elderly populations and those with chronic illnesses has been limited; access to paid cleaning and care services has been limited; and the workload within the household (such as cleaning, cooking, laundry etc.) due to the long lockdowns intensified. Each of these has been met by women's unpaid (social reproductive) work within the household.
21. Additionally, the pandemic has led to significant problems regarding women's paid work. Firstly, due to the already fragile conditions of women in the labour markets, women disproportionately lost more jobs compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the pandemic has affected sectors in which the majority of the workers are women – women constitute almost all of the domestic workers, more than 70 % of health care and education workers, etc.

Violence against women

22. Apart from the oppression resulting from low income, reproduction chores and the attack on women's rights, women are subjected to various kinds of physical violence. It is wrong to believe that this is only happening in poor or retrograde countries and that women encounter no such dangers in the Western world. Statistics about rape and femicides in Western countries are revelatory.
23. There are certain groups of women and girls who are at higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence due to different vulnerabilities. This includes those with disabilities (who are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence than those without), Indigenous women and girls, and those with precarious migration statuses. [11]
24. The recent years of the pandemic and the following financial crisis only aggravated an already tough situation. Domestic violence increased internationally by 30% during the lockdowns. Only during the first 7 weeks of the lockdown, one act of domestic violence was denounced every 30 seconds in the UK; a huge rise in calls from women asking for help was observed in Italy, while the complaints rose by 161%. The

cruel budget cuts in the welfare state weakened even further the public system of social support to victims of violence: staff, material and infrastructure are dramatically deficient. In “third world” countries where the welfare state has never or only partially been implemented, violence against women has increased in parallel with the aggravation of the labour of social reproduction, among other factors.

25. The police and the justice system has regularly proven its deep links with patriarchy. The vast majority of abusers are not arrested, prosecuted nor convicted. This is even more prevalent in cases where the perpetrator(s) is/are part of the bourgeois class. Such were the cases of the “Wolfpack trial” in the Spanish State in 2016, the “Belfast rugby rape trial” in Northern Ireland in 2018 and the Cork trial in Ireland, as well as the gang-rape of the British woman by 12 Israelis in Cyprus in 2019 or the rape of Georgia Bika in Greece in 2022. The feminist and the workers’ movement is the only force that can put pressure on the police and the judicial system and have been able in a number of cases to impose the prosecution and conviction of abusers that would have otherwise “walked away free”.
26. In Iran, in Afghanistan, in Saudi Arabia and other Asian or African countries where reactionary political Islam is in power, violence against women and LGBTQI+ people has reached unimaginable levels. In Nigeria recently there were scores of cases of young girls being kidnapped, gang raped and having their organs removed to be used in spiritual purposes. Religion is always conservative and patriarchal, however religious misogyny can reach the levels of murder.
27. Femicides have been central to feminist struggles internationally, since the “ni una menos” movement erupted in Latin America. In the last few years, a section of the movements is focusing on the demand to identify femicide as a distinct crime and incorporate it as such in the criminal code. This is a correct demand. However, legislation is never enough in itself to change conditions in society. The number of femicides can be reduced only by mass movements and campaigns that aim at changing the material conditions working class people live in, educating society and empowering women.

LGBTQI+ oppression: common oppressor, common struggles

28. The attack on abortion rights in the US has been followed by attacks against LGBTQI+ people. These attacks usually go hand in hand and have the same origin. It has also been the case in Poland, where at the same time of the attack against abortion rights, several cities and regions in the country declared themselves as “LGBTQI+-free zones”. The LGBTQI+ community was attacked as “propaganda targeting traditional family values” or a “fashion”. Being an LGBTQI+ person in Russia can trigger an arrest, trial and legal punishment. In other countries, LGBTQI+ persons’ lives are threatened with death sentences. In Africa, a US Christian right-wing group provides anti-LGBTQI+ training for African politicians, mainly targeting sex education and LGBTQI+ rights.
29. LGBTQI+ people are constantly faced with discrimination at school and work, bullying and attacks, including in the Western countries, where they are supposedly better protected. Trans people in particular face some of the most vicious attacks which have deadly consequences. Trans people experience systematic social and economic marginalization, pathologization, stigma, discrimination, and violence.^[iii] The murderers of Zak Kostopoulos, a gay activist who was assassinated in 2018 in Greece, got extremely light sentences. The homophobic Erdoğan government in Turkey has been cracking down on the growing movement, especially in recent years. LGBTQI+ pride marches but also indoor events, even film screenings, have been banned.

30. Macho culture and mentality are very prominent in all capitalist countries, they are perpetuating oppression and violence, not only against women but also against LGBTQI+ people. Propaganda against them is disseminated by prestigious institutions, like religious ones, but also by conservative and alt right-wing politicians. They are portrayed as a threat to society's values, often as perverted and mentally deranged.
31. Capitalism is reliant upon ensuring that those of us who make up the majority of the world –the working class and poor– are divided. It is clear that those in power will stop at nothing to withhold the status quo which can be described as patriarchal and hetero-normative. The consequence is discrimination, violence and adverse health and economic effects for women and LGBTQI+ people. As Marxists, we understand that people experience varying levels of oppression under capitalism. Working class people are first oppressed on the basis of their class and then on the basis of their gender, sexual identity or race. Linking our struggles, uniting and fighting together through working class solidarity is crucial to begin the process of overthrowing this exploitative system.

Privilege theory, intersectionality, bourgeois feminism/feminising the elite and Marxism

32. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxist ideas entered an epoch of significant retreat in the 1990s. Postmodern ideas came to the fore and there was a general shift towards an individualistic consciousness and away from class-based struggle. This was part of and the result of the successful neoliberal push from the ruling elite.
33. Since that time, theories such as *intersectionality* and *privilege theory* have flourished within feminist circles and have come to be known under the umbrella term "*identity politics*". According to identity politics, various types of oppression exist in society and become the main element with which each person identifies. This form of oppression-based identity drives each individual to seek out people with similar experiences, to join with them and to strive together to improve their life.
34. At first, this sounds similar to what we have outlined above as double or special oppressions and it is easy to see why these ideas are attractive to people moving into struggle for their rights. However, the role of class is generally relegated down the list of oppressions and not viewed as central nor is class society viewed as the source/root of all oppression.
35. Privilege theory, on the other hand, considers that some groups are "privileged" in society, in the sense that they are given rights that are denied to other groups, or that they face much less danger than other groups. Privilege theory understands society as a pyramid, on top of which sits the white male.
36. Intersectionality, explains that some people suffer from more than one oppression, and are therefore in a more vulnerable situation – a black lesbian woman for example is in a worse position than an Asian straight male. The problem here is that oppression deriving from sexism or racism is separated from the class element. Oppressions are understood as parallel concepts and the main purpose is to acknowledge them and make them visible. As Marxists, we are intersectional, but in the sense that all oppressions have the class element as a common denominator and determining factor. In the way that it is usually perceived, intersectionality ends up being divisive. We believe that the unique role of class must be explained: the role of the working class as the only revolutionary force in society that can overthrow capitalism, the system that gives birth and reproduces all oppression, should be stressed.
37. Because of this lack of a class-based approach, an individualistic process of simply cataloguing and

describing oppressions and their intersections has developed. This process actually ends up being more divisive than inclusive, with individuals forming conflicting subgroups based on their perceived level of privilege/oppression. The focus is moved on who is the “most oppressed” and the onus is on the individual to change their own personal behaviours, rather than on the system that has established oppressive attitudes as the norm.

38. The argument behind this is that these groups have been obliged to remain silent and hidden for too long and it is now time that they came to the spotlight on the basis of their level of oppression or privilege. The starting point of this argument is absolutely correct. Bringing attention to the plight of marginalised and oppressed groups is an important first step towards emancipation. However, it becomes a dead end when it stops there; when visibility or representation for women and LGBTQI+ people become an end in and of itself and when the oppressed do not join forces in order to overthrow the system in which all oppression is rooted.
39. As a result of this approach, beliefs and attitudes have developed whereby in a number of cases, if you are not a member of a particular oppressed group, then you are not allowed to speak about their struggle, address it, point a way forward, or disagree. This black and white approach has also played out in regard to slogans such as “*I believe her*” being adopted as a universal truth. We do not treat women with disbelief, we don’t blame victims, as capitalism does. It is also true that the vast majority of women who report abuse speak the truth. However, this is not a universal truth and it cannot replace processes of investigation and punishment of the abusers.
40. Another form of identity politics that has evolved and held sway from the 90s is that of feminising the elite. From “breaking the glass ceiling” to being a “girl boss,” this kind of feminism is for women of means, or what we refer to as bourgeois feminism. The argument is that we must increase the representation of women in power and managerial positions as a step forward to a better society and women's emancipation.
41. While there is a gender problem in politics and workplaces, electing or promoting women solely on the basis of their gender is not a solution. Across the world, we have seen that the election of women has not automatically translated to an improvement in the lives of working-class women and people in general. When forced to choose between their class, and their gender, class position triumphs.
42. Conservative women in governments and national or international decision-making bodies will in the end implement policies perpetuating and propagating oppression on women and working-class people. Roberta Mezzola, the European Parliament’s President, is a vocal foe of abortion rights; Giorgia Meloni, Italy’s Prime Minister, has clearly stated that her objective is the restoration of traditional family values, and considers migrants and the “modern lifestyle” (including abortion rights, LGBTQI+ rights etc.) as destructive.
43. Identity politics are not the path that will lead us to equality. The feminist and LGBTQI+ movements must incorporate class characteristics and an anticapitalist programme in order for our struggle for genuine liberation to be victorious.

[Socialist Feminism: fighting for our rights today and for a better future.](#)

44. Capitalism endorses and perpetuates patriarchy, which is expressed by the sexist oppression towards women and LGBTQI+ people, which in turn is reflected from discrimination at school, work,

neighbourhood, to violence.

45. Even though the oppression of women and LGBTQI+ people is common for all, working class women and LGBTQI+ people are much more oppressed. Working people regardless of gender, skin colour, race, religion or body type, are all victims of capitalist exploitation, and need to fight in unity against the system and all its manifestations.
46. Therefore, the workers movement has to adopt women's and LGBTQI+ people's demands and at the same time movements against gender oppression have to fight against capitalism which perpetuates their oppression, as part of the working class in order to build a society without exploitation, oppression and discrimination, that is a socialist society.
47. As Marxists we participate in women's and LGBTQI+ movements. We participate, or create where not existing, women's or LGBTQI+ organisations, fronts or campaigns. At the same time, we aim to raise consciousness in the direction of linking these demands with working class struggles and the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system and build a socialist society.

ⁱ This document attempts to use inclusive language. This is important as not all women can become pregnant, and not everyone who can become pregnant is a woman. Trans men and non-binary people who have internal reproductive organs can also become pregnant. See for example: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/can-men-become-pregnant>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/young-persons-disabilities> & <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5026-violence-against-indigenous-women-and-girls-report-special>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7035595/>