

The Strike as Our Revolutionary Time - Ni Una Menos Campaign in Argentina and beyond

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Cecilia Palmeiro on the Ni Una Menos Campaign in Argentina and how the idea of a women's strike spread into an international phenomena.

The idea of a women's strike, as a radical measure of force that could mark the beginning of a new age of feminist struggles, has been around in the collective imagination of organized women for at least 100 years. Since the beginning of the Ni una menos movement in Argentina, we had been dreaming, and joking, about how it would be for women to strike, and how it would change the history (or herstory) of feminist politics in terms of making visible all the naturalised invisible labour we do that consume our time and energy. These conversations between members of the collective started exactly three years ago and the idea was almost like the sketch for a work of art. The idea remained a dream until Polish women went on strike over a planned abortion ban on October 3, 2016. That was the moment our dream started to take shape and we perceived the magnitude of its potentials. Two weeks later, that possibility became an objective historical necessity when the articulation between the State's repressive violence and femicide became evident to us. On October 8, 2016, Lucía Pérez, a sixteen-year-old girl, was raped and murdered by impalement, a colonial form of torture used by the Inquisition in the Americas. The next day, police heavily repressed the massive Argentinean National Women's Encounter's rally. The coincidence of both police violence and sexual violence in the context of the key date October 12, anniversary of the colonization of America, called for immediate action. On October 13, the collective Ni Una Menos decided to make an open call for the first National Women's Strike and to organize together with many women's groups through a popular assembly.

The idea of the Strike went viral and in five days we organized the first National Women's Strike on October 19, 2016. We stopped activities for one hour and rallied all over Argentina and Latin America (NYC also rallied with us). That key date became a turning point in the history of Latin American feminism, because we were able to reveal the plot of violences against women, and to perceive the links between the most dramatic forms of femicide, rape and physical violence, to the more naturalised forms of exploitation and extractivism of our vital force in the context of neoliberalism. We raised awareness about the fact that machista violence is inherent to capitalism and that patriarchy is an economic arrangement by which women and feminized bodies become a world proletariat, the poor of the world. It became evident that the most brutal forms of machista violence are an exercise of discipline over our bodies in order to guarantee our subjection to the rules of our own oppression.

The women's strike is different from a traditional strike as the trade unions defined it, because most women are not waged workers but work in the informal economies and domestic labour. Our reformulation of the strike allowed us to map all the forms of labour that women do without hierarchies, and to perceive the value we produce at all levels, because our work is not limited to

our jobs and it is naturalized as affective duties. The strike made visible that with or without love, domestic, reproductive and care-giving tasks are still labour.

The strike positioned us as subjects (and not objects) of history; it allowed us to shift from victims into protagonists of the economy and of the order of material, intellectual and spiritual production. A women's strike is a form of direct economic and social intervention. It points out at the power from below and our fundamental role in the world economy. Although our devaluated labour in the market (Argentina's gender pay gap is 27%) and the unrecognized labour at home supports the capitalist economy, we can also bring it down. Our reappropriation of the concept and practice of the strike turned our feminist movement into a radical anti-capitalist political force.

After the first National Strike, the internationalism of our movement demanded a networked global action, and thus we called the first International Women's Strike on March 8, 2017, with the participation of women from sixty countries. All Latin America engaged in the strike and it became a decisive moment in the history of our revolutions, especially as our region is a laboratory for the contemporary phase of high-impact neoliberalism. The weaving of this new internationalism led us to expand our claims to include women from very different backgrounds: black feminism, indigenous feminism, queer feminism, popular feminism, migrant feminism, etc. We can describe this process as radicalization by massification and inclusion. Through these unprecedented alliances that connected women around the world we could detect the global trends in violence against women and, notwithstanding the variations depending on different contexts, we observed the same pattern of feminization of poverty.

Because we are experiencing a process of concentration of capital in the hands of the 1%, violence against women is increasing at all levels: physical and economic violence are rising at the same pace. The process of accumulation by dispossession that implies policies of austerity and massive acquisition of debt (both at the individual level and the State level) specifically affects women and feminized bodies through the development of new forms of labour exploitation (including slave labour and human trafficking): the withdrawal of programs for protection of victims and the dismantlement of sexual education programs and limited access to healthcare; the lack of autonomy that debts impose on our bodies; the colonial plunder over our territories, the narco-violence; the business of war and weapon trafficking; the criminalization of our migratory movements and of our identities; the massive layoffs; the police and military repression of our protest; and the destruction of Mother Earth and its consequences that threaten the very continuity of life on this planet.

After the first International Women's Strike the feminist movement has grown exponentially. It has become the avant-garde of the global resistance against neoliberalism and also of the creative imagination of new utopias. Feminism has penetrated the grassroots organizations and it is transforming politics from below in political parties, trade unions, social movements, households, schools, churches and every single social institution. Thousands of new collectives have emerged and work together in massive global campaigns. The experiment of the International Women's Strike has succeeded at many levels, affecting the political but also the micro-political, existential dimension of this molecular revolution.

The process of the strike built a global network of feminist politics able to link struggles over land, labour and human rights, from a feminist perspective. Through these oceanic protests that traverse borders, languages and identities, women of the world are composing a new collective subject: the feminist tide. The tide is intersectional, horizontal, transversal, and global: we have constituted ourselves as a revolutionary subject, yet our revolution cannot be captured in the traditional frames of representative democracy, although it appears and floods everywhere. The tide permeates artistic languages, intervenes in political parties, imposes agenda within trade unions, changes the relations of production in factories and in the informal economy, and fuels disputes over power in all spheres

of life. It blooms in street protests while confronting households and bedrooms.

In the tide, we have strengthened international and intersectional sorority as a source of power and social transformation. The tide liberates a creative process in which we connect the global disobediences and resistances, we articulate concepts and struggles, we analyse the new forms of exploitation and extractivism and we construct a revolutionary feminist perspective that is able to address this critical moment of humanity that threatens the very continuity of life in this planet. We have developed a feminist ethics of life and not of sacrifice, and found new conceptual tools to confront the gendered, sexed and racialised international division of labour.

This edition of the international strike is bigger and more powerful, the idea is already installed in the public imagination and it is contagious.

The strike is a process for the production of a new time. By striking we occupy and recover our time for ourselves. In the revolutionary time we block the practices that perpetuate our oppression and we connect with other women, with their struggles. This is how we practice together a feminism of the 99% and we perform a world for the 99%, the world in which we want to live. This March 8 we call for 24 hours of disobedience against patriarchy. Let this key date mark the beginning of our new lives.

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P.S.

* <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3670-the-strike-as-our-revolutionary-time>

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