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POWER UPSIDE DOWN: WOMEN'S GLOBAL STRIKE

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## POWER UPSIDE DOWN: WOMEN'S GLOBAL STRIKE

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# INTRODUCTION:



TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL  
STRIKE PLATFORM

- ▶ THE FIRST GLOBAL women's strike on March 8th 2017 was an unprecedented experience, with the ability to catalyze a moment of exceptional intensity, synthesizing women's mobilizations against violence and oppression across the world. Accounts and experiences from that strike were collected in our first reader.\* As Transnational Social Strike Platform, we find that the astonishing circulation capacity of the strike, and its social and transnational dimension, confirm its potential to be the political pivot of a new global movement. By bringing the fight against patriarchal violence both into the work-place and into society by and utilising the strike as political refusal of violence and exploitation, women have established unexpected connections between different subjects and fields of struggle. This mobilisation proved not to be a mere isolated experiment, but rather opened up a field of possibility that resulted in a new call for a global strike on March 8th 2018. This second date is considered, not as a recurring ritual, but more accurately as a sign of the persistence of the strike. On these grounds and shared perspective of struggle, we invited women from different countries between Europe and the Americas to discuss the ways in which they are approaching the strike now.

The contributions from Spain, Italy, Sweden, UK, US and Argentina underscore a keen awareness of being part of a global process of uprising. This reader, therefore, is not simply a chronicle, summing up local experiences, but has the intent and aim to deepen the process and prospect of the feminist strike, which is triggering new opportunities of initiative and organization in each various context. The decision to publish it before the 8<sup>th</sup> of March is an attempt to think together, from different angles, about the common political challenges faced by all of those taking part in it. How do we carry the possibility offered by the global women's strike to its full potential and allow it to overflow into our reality? How do we struggle against those who undermine it by declaring it as impossible or "not real", or those who claim that we are downgrading the strike form? How do we envision the feminist strike as a possibility and project for fighting back against the global neoliberal regime of exploitation and oppression? How do we organize our political communication and transnational infrastructure in order to allow the effects of the strike to be as widespread and long-lasting as possible? ▶

\* GET LAST YEAR'S STRIKE READER HERE: [BIT.LY/TSS-READER-1](https://bit.ly/tss-reader-1)



The comrade from Ni una menos Argentina states that “*The time from one date to another is not empty*”, and this March 8th we see a clear sign of what it means for the strike to be a process, and not simply an event. Thanks to this process, and to the force of a global mass mobilisation, millions of women acquired the strength to speak out and refuse patriarchal violence. The huge feminist marches and demonstrations all around the world encouraged and supported those who have individually chosen to denounce sexual violence and harassment. The incredible flow of stories circulated under the hashtag #metoo is the effect of a collective accumulation of power. Nonetheless, it does not automatically result into a step closer towards a shared and increased collective initiative and organization. The question we are confronting, therefore, is how to be part of this flow, by preventing its neutralization through the neoliberal logics of individualization and the institutional mirroring of cries and redressing of the issue. The case of Sweden presented here is particularly revealing, because the #metoo experience had a certain impact there, while the women’s strike has not yet made inroads. By pointing at the horizon of a radical “shift of power”, the strike reveals itself to be a threat for an “institutional feminism” that is unable to see the global and systemic character of women’s oppression. There is still a lingering hope placed in a possible local or national public intervention to be able to redress it by decree. The global element of the strike allows for a process with a double awakening. First, it provides the possibility to enter the field of struggle not just as mourning victims, or simply as subjects waiting to be recognized or compensated, but as political subjects, taking the lead of a struggle against neoliberalism (which seemed impossible until women stood up against it). Secondly, it obligates us to think about how to assume a global perspective without ignoring the persistence of local or regional differences. As the Swedish comrades’ reference to the war fought by women in Rojava shows, the importance of not assuming the starting point of a given destination like the seemingly pacified and progressive contexts of the Western, European remains of social democracy, but to instead recognize that neoliberalism is supported on a global level by different intensities of patriarchal violence. The strike, then, should be able to *synchronize different conditions and struggles without expect-*

*ing to homogenize them.* The TSS Platform interpolates and works to build a transnational infrastructure able to intensify the circulation of the strike and to provide continuity and a capacity to grow in its political potential.

## HOW TO MAKE THE STRIKE SOCIAL

The strike becomes a political mark of a possibility of radicalization and synchronization, opening up an “organizational horizon” that poses precise and inescapable questions in each context. One question already raised by the women’s strike concerns the urgency to find ways to enlarge the strike to reproductive labor, that is to all those activities performed by women in the space of the household, always regarded as “private” and, consequently, unpolitical, as the Spanish women from Marea Granate — Femigrantes observe. The problem is not simply solved by pro-

## “SINCE IT IS GLOBAL, THE STRIKE ALLOWS FOR A DOUBLE AWAKENING”

viding visibility to the interruption of domestic work. The stake lies in highlighting the social dimension of reproductive labour itself, to disrupt social reproduction in a wider sense. The target is set on displaying the way social hierarchies and gendered positions are reproduced through sexual violence, harassment in the workplace, and the sexual division of labor in all spheres. To socialize the strike means therefore to detect and fight the connection between patriarchal violence and exploitation which is at the core of neoliberal society. The strike is made social when it aims to hit the institutional and social processes of hierarchisation — the processes that intensify precarity by producing isolation and fragmentation. Thus, the different practices and multiple ways to participate in the strike that groups are employing in all countries do not reduce the strike to a symbolic action. Rather, they multiply attempts to politicise women’s position within society, bringing the “margins to the centre” as the Women’s Strike Assembly UK comrades state. A clear example of this emerging from various contributions collected in this reader is the attempt to include the struggle against racism as a decisive feminist

- ▶ stance inscribed in the process of the strike. Migrant women everywhere are faced with many forms of sexual abuse throughout their journey for freedom, while at the same time the precarious status imposed by the residence permit turns them into a more exploitable labour force. The intersectional approach highlighted by many contributions appears to be not so much the starting point of the struggle, but rather the effect of the struggle itself. The manifold identities of the subjects involved in the process are relevant in the light of their politicisation, that occurs in the very moment in which their function in the reproduction of an overall system of oppression and exploitation is exposed and contested. Accordingly, we may say that *the strike becomes social when it produces a political connection among different subjects by politicising the general effects of specific conditions*. This is the horizon and the possibility pointed out by the feminist strike — when the mourning turns into struggle and the claim to smash patriarchy aims to be also a lever for overturning neoliberalism as a global order.

## FROM GLOBAL FEMINISM TO THE STRIKE AND RETURN

The women's strike “*must account for multiple labour realities that escape the borders of waged and unionized work*”, as the women from Ni una menos Argentina say. It requires a broadening of the notion of strike so as to include unpaid, informal, migrant and irregular labour. “*When the strike ceases to be the exclusive prerogative of unions [...] it stops being an order to which one simply knows how to comply or adhere*”. As a matter of fact, just because the unions reclaim the strike as an exclusive prerogative, women everywhere have to fight in order to gain their support, which is in many ways necessary in order to conquer the real possibility of interrupting production and involving as many workplaces as possible. What is clear, however, is also the way in which the feminist use of the strike is exposing and pointing out all the limitations of the trade-unions who are restricted to labor disputes, while at the same time highlighting the possibility of bringing strike back to the centre, after years in which it has been practically deprived of all its power and effectiveness by the neoliberal organization of labour. In other words, *the women's strike lifts the possibility to set a new trend also in labor struggles*. This is quite clear from both the contributions of the International Women's Strike US comrades, which claim the power to strike in a context where labour legislation is particular-



ly restrictive, and of Women's Strike Assembly in the UK, where the legal right to strike has been further restricted since 2016. This year dozens of organizations and base unions are endorsing the strike, reacting to years of decaying rights for workers and invoking the strike "as a necessary and political form of action that is often seen as an impossibility and therefore a privilege". In Spain the autonomous, global dimension and massive character of the process has forced the major trade unions to endorse the strike. It is clear, then, that the question of how to strike is not just technical, but rather political, as stated by the Italian comrades of Non Una di Meno, dealing with a partial legal ban due to proximity of the strike with the national elections. The feminist strike is therefore an occasion to rethink the strike as the expression of a collective insubordination against the overall conditions of precarization, because it points at the necessity of breaking isolation and overcoming the weakness to which precarization condemns labour as such. With this reasoning, the International Women's Strike US calls for a feminism of the 99%, bringing the slogan of the Occupy movement back in. By claiming to be feminist, this 99% does not neutralize the differences that crisscross the working class, but rather catalyses them, pointing at the possibility for the women's strike to be at the forefront of a general struggle, inciting a wider movement of insubordination.

Besides implying a general transformation of the strike, this global process of uprising ushers in a transformation of feminism as well. The feminist strike presents itself not as a separatist or identity-based fight of women's and lgbtqi+ subjects, but rather as a struggle able to involve migrants, precarious and industrial workers of all genders turning the refusal of patriarchal violence into the shared starting point - a fight against capitalism, racism and the violence of this society. In this perspective, a systematic work of connections which gives voice to these transnational processes between the events, fostering the social dimension of the strike, and imposing a general reassessment of the very practice of the strike is increasingly necessary. The strike is not a "given", in each context, it needs to be defended, accomplished, fostered, vocalized and contagious. In line with this, the contributions presented here are insights of the chances and challenges of the global process of uprising, betting on the strike, knowing that *"the strike's message is the strike itself, because it shows where the power lies. It is a demonstration of power that we see necessary to maximise our power"*. ■

# THE INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST:

## APPROPRIATING AND OVERFLOWING THE STRIKE



Verónica Gago

Ni Una Menos, Argentina

- ▶ ON MARCH 8, 2017 we coordinated between more than fifty countries, drawing on the momentum that we had been building since the strike on October 19, 2016. The international women's strike in 2018 sets a date again, in assemblies in many neighborhoods and cities, in meetings in unions and schools, in encounters in factories and community spaces. The strike expresses, once again, an organizational horizon here and now, constructed from below: as an action that has revitalized the broad movement of women, including trans women, lesbians, and transvestites, that has not stopped growing, expanding, and diversifying. In this sense, it is important to think of the strike as a process and not as an event. The time between one "date" and another "date" is not empty.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the strike's strength is always a combination of mourning and struggle: in March we commemorate a new anniversary of the assassination of Berta Cáceres who lives on today in struggles against neoextractive projects, as well of the girls who died on March 8, 2017 in the children's home in Guatemala.

By turning March 8 into a day of strike, we brought back its working class history, supporting textile workers from all eras, with an insurgent memory that is woven from everyday resistances. But by promoting it from Latin America, we expanded its meanings to include a multiplicity of tasks and geographies that had generally remained in the *periphery of the worker imagination*. And, above all, we linked violence against the body of women and feminized bodies to concrete territorial conflicts: struggles for housing and against the expansion of extractivism through the dispossession of lands; struggles against the criminalization of popular and migrant economies; struggles against structural adjustment policies and the financialization of poverty; struggles against the illegality (which is a class-based segmentation) of abortion.

Here I want to develop some points about how, through the strike, we *revolutionize our practices as a feminist movement, at the same time as we revolutionize the tool of the strike itself, a tool traditionally only associated with the narrow world of masculine and waged labor*. When the strike ceases to be the exclusive prerogative of unions, it stops being a decision made from above, and therefore, the strike stops being an order to which one simply knows how to comply or adhere. The strike appropriated by the wom- ▶

- en's movement is literally *overflowed*: it must account for multiple labor realities that escape the borders of waged and unionized work, that question the limits between productive and reproductive labor, formal and informal labor, remunerated and free tasks, between migrant and national labor, between the employed and the unemployed. The strike taken up by the women's movement directly targets a central element of the capitalist system: the sexual and colonial division of labor.

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At the same time, it opens up a concrete and situated research question: what does it mean to strike in each diverse reality, taking seriously the singularity and complexity of each different labor-vital experience? How is this redefinition and expansion of the working classes interconnected with the differences that turn the map of work into something radically heterogeneous and segmented? How do we achieve a common plan of action in the face of the multiplicity that challenges the very idea of the accumulation of forces? The responses to these questions can have a first phase that consists of explaining why a strike cannot be carried out in the home or as a street vendor or as a prisoner or agricultural worker or as a free lancer or as a migrant worker (identifying ourselves as those woman who "cannot" strike). Yet, the question immediately takes on another power: it forces these experiences to resignify and expand what is suspended, what is blocked, and what is defied when the strike must accommodate those realities, widening the social field in which the strike is inscribed and where it produces effects.

A question that was asked years ago by the Madrid-based collective *Precarias a la Deriva* resounds in us: what is your strike? But now it is conjugated on the mass scale and radicalized in the face of the offensive of machista violence that puts us in a state of assembly and emergency action. Because the strike allows us to politicize violence against women in a way that confronts that victimization and the permanent state of mourning to which they (the media, state institutions, and many NGOs) want to confine us. In the violence against women and feminized bodies, new forms of labor exploitation, economic and financial violence, state violence, political violence, and multiple forms of dispossession are manifested and intertwined.

In this sense, the strike puts the intersectionality of struggles and their transnational connection into practice and it does so by involving a class dimension: beyond identitarian multiculturalism, it links violence against women and feminized bodies to forms of exploitation and the extraction of value, police violence, and corporate offensives against common resources, remapping *social conflict in practice*.

## “THE STRIKE DEFIES THE BORDERS OF LABOR & PRODUCES A GROUND OF RADICALIZATION”

Speaking about and enacting the strike situates us as political subjects and not victims to be repaired and/or redeemed (usually by the state). And it is due to this expansion of the strike tool that its meaning and efficacy has multiplied. Thus, the popular, indigenous, communitarian, peripheral, slum feminisms from Latin America, that deliberalize the politics of recognition, are not interested in quotas, and distrust identitarian traps, foreground the precarity of existence as a common condition, but one that becomes unique through concrete conflicts.

The organizational horizon of the strike repositions the class, anti-colonial, and mass dimension of feminism in a creative and defiant way, because it does not provide a static, ready to use, tool, but rather one that must be invented in the organizational process itself, and that at the same time, allows us to understand why women and feminized bodies are constituted as a key to capitalist exploitation, particularly in its moment of financial hegemony.

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In that aspiration, we are mapping non-recognized and non-remunerated modes in which we produce value to elaborate a diverse collective image of what we call work. The women's strike thus defies the borders of labor and in this way produces a ground of radicalization that interpellates other movements, other practices, and other experiences. That is why #WeStrike. ■

# TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STRIKE



Marea Granate  
Femigrantes, Spain



The response to the 8M actions in 2017 was quite powerful in the Spanish State. Following a positive assessment of last year's International Women's Strike, many different collectives, from the different territories of our country decided to start working to organise a bigger strike for 2018. It was crucial to engage as many participants as possible from all different regions of the state and also to get in contact with activists abroad. Therefore, during the summer of 2017, and after the first meeting in Madrid, many feminist groups from all the different regions of Spain started organising themselves and creating their own spaces to strike from a local perspective, but also with a national and international dimension. A precedent that also inspired us was the first women strike (called "Vaga de totes") in Catalunya, which took place in 2015, focusing not only on labour, but also on the social, productive and reproductive fields and was followed by hundreds of women from that region.

Then, different feminist collectives starting to gather and to organise for the 2018 Strike: in the summer 2017 there was a meeting in Madrid; and in October 2017 another one in Elx (Alicante), where about a hundred Spanish feminists gave birth to a statewide platform, called "Hacia la Huelga Feminista" (Towards the Feminist Strike). Spanish migrants living abroad, along with international activists from Mexico, Argentina, Italy and other countries participated in this meeting via skype. Interestingly, the organisation of the event placed some men in the practical role of taking care of the logistics (children care, food and drinks, etc.) This symbolic gesture was an appetizer for the care — taking strike to come.

So, by the time autumn arrived, the International Feminist Strike 8M2018 was already in the mind and dreams of many interconnected Spanish activists. Since then, thousands of women have been building up the structure together. All the groups worked in two ways: First, by keeping contact both face to face and online, in order to create the statewide articulation. Second, in parallel, doing a lot of grassroots fieldwork to build the strike with the local people from each area and from their own intersections. ►

- ▶ Also, an international commission started to make contact with different initiatives worldwide with a clear goal: networking with women from as many countries as possible to simultaneously struggle together against the patriarchal oppression. It would be a dream come true if the 8M feminist strike reached all the corners of the World and we became hundreds, thousands, millions of women claiming together against the patriarchal system that threatens our lives and the life of the planet.

We want to stop this system and its violence, thus we can build a new and more fair reality where nobody is oppressed. To do so we need to be united, to collaborate from our places and our perspectives, all oriented towards the same horizon: reaching livable conditions for everyone and a life without discrimination which we all deserve. More than 400 Spanish activists attended the second big meeting that took place in January in Zaragoza. Some local struggles were shared, previous strike experiences discussed, a manifest was jointly composed by the attendants. Among other activities, different local voices were heard and territories fertilised one another with their strike creativity. The next action will take place on Sunday 11th February in Madrid, it will be a concert of different female singers and the official presentation of the Strike. So, here is the big question: How to do a feminist strike?

## HOW TO DO A FEMINIST STRIKE?

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Our aim is not to organise a *classic* workers' strike, but instead to go beyond this format: our plan is to paralyse all the different invisible tasks and activities that women usually do, in all different levels and places. Specifically, we call a housework and care strike in the private field, a labour strike and a consumer strike (both in the public field) and a students' strike for all the levels of education and schools.

These different (though closely related) strikes have their origin in a common idea: we believe that the World does not work without us, without our care, without our purchases and without our labour. However, these tasks are barely acknowledged as they are done mostly by us, by women. Most of us are in charge of these tasks and exploited not just in the labour and public field, but also in our homes. The care-work of women (for example: nurturing, cleaning, taking care of children, sick

or old members of the family) is essential in order to keep living, however, almost nobody recognises these tasks and moreover, they are never (or almost never) economically rewarded.

The same happens in the markets and shops: our everyday purchases are essential to the movements of the global capitalist system, which would not work without us. Therefore, we want to paralyse it all and to show to the world that we, women, are essential and indispensable to everything, everywhere. Here are some ideas for the strikes: in the care-work strike we want to bring these questions to the table: Who does most of the housework in our spaces? What would happen if the women did not take their children to school or if nobody would go to the market and prepare the meals? What if these tasks were shared instead of done just by one person, probably a woman, probably yourself? In the labour workplace, it is important to be informed about your rights, so you can also speak with your co-workers and create a common plan or activity for this day, such as printing leaflets with your labour rights or having a ten minute long symbolic strike. Maybe you are forced to work this day, but if there is a chance to speak about your rights or to show the difficulties that women face at their workplaces, March 8th is the perfect day to do so. The consumers strike is easy: just avoid purchasing that day, especially in malls or big corporations. Also, try not to use technological devices, or watch TV too much. It is also a great day for getting to know the small producers of your city and to support them. Finally, the student strike is addressed to paralyse all the educational institutions on all levels. You do not go to school, high school or university; in the case that you are obliged to attend, while you are in class, speak with your teachers and classmates, share your concerns, create a common plan, organise talks about women's rights in your center and be creative!

## “LET THE RESISTANCE OF EACH OF OUR SISTERS AROUND THE WORLD RESONATE IN UNISON”

We want to paralyse the whole world from our different locations, with an intersectional approach. We understand that each woman is different, so we want to take account of all these different realities, which affect us all, and to fight from



there. We are migrants, students, butches, journalists, housewives, trans, artists, self-employed, doctors, lawyers and much, much more... We are all different but we all want to put into question the current dynamics and axes of power that strangle our world. We are aware about the fact that organising such a Strike is not an easy process; being such an heterogeneous group, but we are determined to fight together in this common way, embracing our plurality on the basis of our mutual acknowledgement. We want to let the resistance of each of our sisters around the world to resonate in unison in every one of us, re-sisters.

March 8th is an important date for us, but the process of getting there has been even more important, because it allows different women from different places, with different thoughts, existences and perspectives, the chance to meet and gather in this common fight against patriarchy. We are all together and determined to reach a better life for us all. After this big, surely unforgettable, day of empowerment, the common struggle continues, the challenge will be to stay connected and to keep organising, working, creating, growing stronger, and building a better future, together. ■



# PUBLIC AND UNION SUPPORT

As a result of the work put in by the union workgroup, the biggest unions in the Spanish state (UGT, CCOO, CGT, CNT) are publicly supporting the strike. This is a key factor that will help the Spanish female workers to know their labour rights regarding the strike. We hope that this will lead to a bigger social success of the strike. However, it is also very important to remain vigilant to avoid the strike from being appropriated by any political institution, because this strike is for the women.

On the other hand, it is essential to keep in mind that a massive amount of Spanish workers do not work due to an unsustainable and high unemployment rate. As usual, this situation hits women harder (18% of Spanish women do not have jobs according to the National Statistics Institute), as well as similar statistics for poverty and general precarity and uncertainty about the future.

Therefore, the strike actions are equally oriented towards care, consumption and studies and not only focused in the workplace, as we have highlighted above.

## STAY INFORMED

Information in Spanish about actions in different territories and other material is constantly uploaded here:

<http://hacialahuelgafeminista.org/>

This site hosts as well an activist collection, to which all women can contribute with their artistic-activist inspirational creations.

Information is also shared and updated daily on our facebook, twitter, instagram & youtube accounts. From the neighborhoods and markets to the worldwide web, from within dark apartments to the sunny streets, from personal problems to social awareness, from local to international... from the Spanish state to the world, we wish you all a deeply meaningful and strong March 8th 2018.

## IN SORORITY,

Femigrantes – <https://www.facebook.com/FeMiGrantxs>  
Marea Granate Feminismos – <https://twitter.com/FeMiGrantxs>

We are a transnational collective of Spanish migrants who keep alive the fire that the outraged lighted in 2011 in the squares of the state. Our feminist workgroup carries out our own different projects related to feminist pedagogy for change and focuses on the intersection between migration and feminism.

STRIKING  
AGAINST VIOLENCE,  
HIERARCHIES &  
EXPLOITATION:

THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S  
STRIKE FROM ITALY

Eleonora Cappuccilli & Vanessa Bilancetti  
Non Una di Meno, Italy



- ▶ WHAT HAPPENS WHEN the strike meets a global women's movement? A process of global refusal of structural violence against women can be triggered. This is what we are experiencing since the end of 2016 in Italy, when a strong women's movement has started, employing the strike as a powerful instrument to subvert production and social reproduction, and to contest patriarchal violence in all its forms. After being part of the global women's strike in 2017, on the 8th of March 2018 we will go on strike. The issue at stake is how to continue to unmask and question gender and sexual relations of power and social hierarchies shaping a whole system of domination, going well beyond the national borders. It is precisely the extent of this process — transnational, social, and political — that prompted us to keep on reflecting on violence as a full-fledged attack not just on women and LGBTQIA subjects, but on all those who are experiencing and rebelling against patriarchal neoliberalism. Inasmuch as gender and sexual violence works as a tool to enforce women's subordination, it serves as a material and symbolic instrument to naturalize and legitimize the necessity of gender as well as social hierarchies, fostering exploitation.

Since its beginning, the Italian movement *Non Una di Meno* (Not One Less) has targeted violence in structural understanding, ending up with the successful strike on the 8th of March 2017, which saw diverse, crowded and loud demonstrations in dozens of Italian cities. But the work of *Non Una di Meno* did not stop after the 8th of March. After more than one year of meetings, demonstrations, public assemblies, informal reunions with workers, migrants, precarious, after the intense activity of the working groups, we published a *Feminist Plan against male and gender violence*. The Plan, which is a collective elaboration of discourses and practices against patriarchal violence, constitutes neither a point of arrival, nor a tool to negotiate with institutions, that have been recognized as complicit with the structural violence we are fighting against. It is rather the starting point to set autonomously the objective of our political initiative: only inside the overall process of the global women's strike the Plan can come to life. "We have a plan" — as we have said loud during the national demonstration of the 25th of November — and we do not intend to stop till we get what we want: an income for self-determination, welfare, a European minimum wage, a European unconditional residence permit for migrants and new practices of social reproduction. ▶

- ▶ This capacity of the Non Una di Meno movement to tackle violence in all its forms is able to denounce conditions and advance claims which are not only related to a feminine condition. One very clear example is the attempt, which is still at stake, to take a decisive stance against the violence of the border regime and of institutional racism, that for migrant women means all kinds of sexual abuses in their journey to Europe, but it hits all migrants through the blackmail of the residence permit and the continuous threat of expulsion. The recent facts of Macerata, where a man has shot targeting only migrants, were justified as a “revenge” against a Nigerian man probably involved in the killing of a young girl. They show how the patriarchal delirium covers and justifies the most brutal racism and, in turn, how racism hides patriarchal violence against women. This is yet another proof of the mutual reinforcement of patriarchy and racism, urging us to take a stance on the side of migrants. For this reason, this year it is even more important to go on strike for freedom of movement and against racist patriarchy, against the invisibilization, victimization and exploitation of migrant women.

However, after the first experiment of global women's strike and after the release of the *Feminist Plan*, Non Una di Meno movement is now facing different challenges and conditions. The public meetings, both national and local ones, are still very busy, but also very heterogeneous. We face the necessity of organising a process which is uncontrollable by nature, because it goes well beyond the organized structures, both in terms of scale and in terms of participation. This necessity is pushing us to rethink collectively practices, discourses, and political actions to improve our common capacity of producing a break in production and reproduction of society.

Furthermore, the 8th of March imposes the impelling question of how to make the strike a tool available to not only to women, LGBTQI+ subjects and their allies, but also to migrants, precarious, industrial workers of all genders. We need to keep asking to ourselves how to make the strike a collective refusal, calling into question all those who do not want to be complicit with this violent state of things, inside and outside the workplaces and in the whole society. In other words, we should take seriously the challenge of bringing the struggle against violence inside the workplaces and, in turn, the strike inside the society. How to link the individual denunciation of the #MeToo to ▶



- ▶ a collective refusal and organisation of the #WeTOOgether. How to carry on this ambitious task, towards and beyond the 8th of March, remains an open question.

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This year the strike will be even more challenging since the 4th of March there will be a general election. The challenge is two-fold: on the one hand, in front of the general election Non Una di Meno needs to reflect on its role, on its autonomy from political parties and electoral campaign, avoiding instrumentalization and asserting our own political initiative. Our strength are mass mobilizations, that are showing our disruptive potential. This awareness, though, does not solve the problem of how to continue to build a massive and autonomous force, but it can be an important occasion to debate about our collective practices.

## “A STRIKE TO MAKE VISIBLE THE HIDDEN CONDITIONS OF OUR OPPRESSION”

On the other hand, general election represents a real and formal obstacle for the strike, since it is not possible to call for a strike for five days after the election, in many working sectors — ministries, regional, townhall and local offices. Nonetheless, we know that this halt is not a technical, but rather a political problem. Even without a legal ban, we know that the strike is always a risk and a challenge, due to the material conditions of our precarious work and life, due to the difficulties to organise in the workplaces, in the universities, and even in the schools, and also due to the blackmail of the residence permit for migrants. We know a similar discussion has taken place in many other countries where the strike is not a constitutional right as it is in Italy. How can we strike when it is not technically possible? How can we make our refusal heard and massive without being tamed in advance by technical and legal limitations? First, we are working at the construction of some practical tools — a “*strike-vademecum*”, a solidarity fund, and an inquiry about harassment in the workplaces — to enact an effective communication on how to strike, and to make possible for women to go on strike. Second, some grassroots trade unions (Slai Cobas, USI, COBAS and USB)

have already called for the strike, accepting our challenge. But we know that all this is not enough, because we want to organise a global feminist strike, a powerful experiment of a transnational social strike. On the 8th of March we call for a strike of productive labour, but also for a 24h strike against social reproduction. A strike of unpaid and domestic labour, a strike against gender roles and positions, a strike to make visible the hidden conditions of our oppression and exploitation. Only through this global feminist strike, we can turn the individual denunciation of the #metoo into the collective refusal of the #wetogether.

Our struggle does not stop the 8th of March. ■

# THE STRIKE IS THE MESSAGE

FEMINIST STRIKE

STREJK

Sarah Kim & Sarah Liz Degerhammer  
Feministisk Strejk Stockholm, Sweden



- ▶ LAST YEAR A Feminist Strike Action group was formed in Sweden in response to Global Women's Strike and in synergy with all the hundreds and thousands of women organising around the world. We made a film\* about the international strike movement and held a demonstration on the 8th of March in the name of the feminist strike. Much to our disappointment however, the momentum did not catch on as it did in some other countries, where the grassroots organising built up structures to widen the strike and had even reinforced connections to unions and feminist collectives etc. We lacked the mobilising power and on a larger scale — collective anger.

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Perhaps the effects were just delayed. As the #metoo movement took the main stage this autumn, a tendency quickly appeared: #metoo groups in Sweden were organising according to professions and exposing the double exploitation at work. Over 60 statements were published by different #metoo groups and in the wake of the flood we have seen that bosses and high positioned status symbols in different fields are those who finally come tumbling down. The possibility that the #metoo movement becomes a veritable worker uprising seems not too unrealistic. The task at hand is to provide encouragement among us, to take advantage of the transformative potential in this tendency. Some of us who last year contributed to a feminist strike in Sweden were prompted by this awakening to propose the strike as an alternative to other actions proposed within the movement. It seems though, that the radical flows are normally met by counter — progressive ebbs. The consensus of this massive working women's movement has unfortunately culminated in meek actions like talking with politicians and setting up seminars within fundamental patriarchal institutions which in the end are graced with a bunch of goodwill for accepting the proposals.

We reasoned that the world and history have shown that women gain rights, better conditions, peace and food by striking. But this suggestion did not resonate well when we introduced it to various #metoo groups. Unfortunately. Some claimed that it is a privilege to strike, others that it affects other women negatively (the female boss or director, or patient) when women refuse to work for a day or two. There are also beliefs that a women's strike is not a "real" strike. That it is not possible to ▶

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\* WATCH THE FILM HERE: [BIT.LY/TSS-STRIKE-VIDEO](https://bit.ly/tss-strike-video)

- strike as a collective of women. If this is true, it is also the very reason we must fight to make it possible.

We are expected to feel that we should be grateful for our jobs when our labour is a requirement for survival and our domestic labour still made a necessity for the total economy. With the double exploitation of women it is also twice as relevant to use the strike weapon. We are in the situation we are in because we don't have the same conditions at work, in our homes and on the streets as men do. To invoke strike as a key for the #metoo argument is to highlight that we are many without rights in our workplaces and that our workplace is everywhere. When we summon a women's strike we take the momentum of the #metoo campaign against male sexual violence to be not only a plea to be treated respectfully. We force the shift of power to our advantage as a way to display our power and change society fundamentally.

## “THE RADICAL FLOWS ARE NORMALLY MET BY COUNTER—PROGRESSIVE EBBS”

We carry this society on our shoulders, with our smiles and with our emotional labour and reproductive work, we are the whole community's quality of life and life—givers. At the hospitals, in houses and apartments, at meetings, at preschools, in any workplace corridor or room, we make life a little bit better for all who pass by. It's the work we do, that's how we get exploited, but that's also what we can take from them. However, in the workers' movement of Sweden, few dare to really talk strike. Instead, other aspects are addressed (and very typical defenses for capitalism), such as pointing out privileges and individual debt. We are not going to get so far by chatting with the minister for gender equality and writing some complimentary amendment in a party program. These very politicians in a parallel sweep, are actively working to eliminate our right to strike.

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*Nirsin Abdullah*, Commander of YPJ, the women's defense unit in Rojava, recently gave a talk in Stockholm and she emphasised the oppression of the woman as a foundation for sustaining undemocratic societies. Without women — our unpaid work and

our cheap labour — they would be nothing. Sexism, in this sense, is an ideological foundation, a must for maintaining capitalism. In order for all people, regardless of sex, to have a chance to be shaped differently, a new society whose institutions work radically differently must be basically built. Yes, Abdullah talks about a region in war. Northern Syria, and the democratic islands built there are under Turkish attack at this moment. But despite this, one dares to dream about and defend a possible other society. The comrades around the world in Spain, Italy, UK, US, Ireland, Poland, Argentina, and so on articulate very clearly their motives to live in a world without this exploitative capitalist system. Why do we not dare? The silence has been broken and #metoo has opened up for a real discussion about inequality and violence against women here in Sweden, but now we have to go further and see that the root of this oppression is not just patriarchy but most definitely also capitalism.

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The women's strike is an international movement which acknowledges the power we have to refuse together and show that we do not accept this violence in our lives. Unlike other struggles where strike has a specific demand within the workplace, here the social element is a binding factor where we recognise how we are dependent on each other and the exploitation is expansive and affecting us all. Therefore, no matter your background, gender, identity, we must unite and fight back together from all directions. The women's strike offers a form with a multitude of ways to participate. The strike's message is the strike itself, because it shows where the power lies. It is a demonstration of power that we see necessary to maximise our power. ■

# WOMEN STRIKE THE EMPIRE:

## THE WOMEN'S STRIKE IN THE UNITED STATES

Cinzia Arruzza

International Women's Strike US, USA

- ▶ WHEN FEMINIST ACTIVISTS and intellectuals published a collective statement calling for a feminism for the 99% and for a day of action in solidarity with the International Women's Strike in 2017, the response was heart-lifting: after only two weeks, and after hours of frantic collective work, a national network of grass-roots groups, informal collectives, national feminist and labor organizations was born — International Women's Strike-US. In only three weeks this network managed to organize demonstrations in all major cities of the country and to challenge the hegemony of liberal and corporate feminism in mainstream media. Moreover, three school districts in states with harsh anti-labor laws shut down on March 8, because a large number of teachers called sick.

The IWS-US network is currently expanding and organizing its second women's strike. Within this network women coming from different traditions and political cultures are rediscovering the joy of solidarity and trust among different struggles and different voices. What unites us is the desire to articulate a different kind of feminism, one which has as protagonists the women who have been left behind by lean-in and corporate feminism and who are suffering from the consequences of decades of neoliberalism and wars: poor and working class women, women of color and migrant women, disabled, Muslim and trans women. Given the large presence of migrant women and women of Latino or Arab background within our ranks, the international dimension of the strike has been one of the main mobilizing factors, in particular as we linked the building of international solidarity among feminist movements to our opposition to US imperialism and war on terror.

The adoption of the strike as a form of struggle and as a political profile has been key to us. First of all, we articulated the idea of a women's strike within a political and theoretical reflection on the concrete forms of women's labor in capitalist societies. Women's work in the formal labor market is only a part of the work performed by women: we consider social reproductive work to be equally important, even when it is unpaid. A women's strike is meant to make this unpaid work visible and to suggest that social reproduction is a key site of struggle. Moreover, because of the sexual division of labor in the formal labor market, a vast number of women hold precarious jobs, don't have labor rights, are unemployed or are undocumented workers. This is why in order to include low wage, unemployed and undocumented women, the

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- ▶ notion of strike had to be broadened in such a way as to include not only strikes in the workplace but also strikes from unpaid social reproductive work, part-time strikes, calls to employers to close business earlier, the organization of boycotts, and other forms of protest that are sensitive to the gendered nature of social relations. Strike has become the umbrella term under which these various forms of action are included because it is the term that best emphasizes the centrality of women's labor and their self-identification as workers, whatever form their work takes.

Secondly, we conceived of our mobilization as a contribution to the rebuilding of class struggle and labor organizing in the United States more widely. The United States have perhaps the worst labor laws among liberal democracies. General strikes and political strikes are forbidden, strikes are tied to narrow economic demands addressed to employers, contracts often have explicit no-strike clauses, the violation of which can cause the worker to lose their job and/or hefty fines to the union organizing the strike. Additionally, several States, such as New York, have laws that explicitly forbid public employees from striking. As a result of this situation as well as of the legalism and business orientation of the unions' leaderships, rate of unionization is abysmally low. This concretely means that almost the totality of workers in the US have no legal means of collective negotiation and defense or assertion of their labor rights. In many cases they don't have any access to basic benefits such as an employer funded health insurance or pension, paid sick leave or parental leave, not to speak of job security. As is obvious, the absence of basic labor rights combined with prohibitive costs for childcare or assistance for the elderly and the sick puts an enormous burden on working women. Past decades of attacks on labor organizing and continuous decline of unionization have demonstrated that compliance with federal and state labor laws — which is the standard position of “business unionism” — is a dead-end. The women's strike was meant to contribute to the political re-legitimation of the very notion of strike within US political discourse, as well as to offer a national platform and visibility to attempts at wild and political strikes in the workplace.

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This year we have worked on strengthening our ties with radical union locals and workers' centers organizing particularly low



wage women in the service industry, who are often also migrant women and women of color. We have called for an hour strike in order to verify the possibility of co-organizing actual work stoppages around the country. At the same time, we have also given indication that there are multiple ways to participate in the strike, from organizing and participating in picket lines and actions of civil disobedience, to joining demonstrations and rallies, and showing symbolic support to the strike in the workplace. Finally, we have adopted a non-separatist practice: we conceive of our mobilization as part and parcel of a broader struggle addressed not only against heterosexism, but also against capitalism and white supremacy. As we consider that full women's and sexual liberation cannot be achieved within capitalism and the current system of racial domination, we have developed a practice of forging alliances with mixed organizations and of supporting ongoing struggles, from Black Lives Matter and the struggle against police brutality and mass incarceration to the struggle against deportations, from last year's environmentalist and anti-colonial fight against the Dakota Pipeline to the many struggles for unionization around the country.

One of the novelties of the current feminist movement is that — contrary to the two previous waves of feminist mobilization — it is not emerging within a context of rising class struggle: in the past, women managed to come together and give voice to specific women's needs and demands within the fixtures and the cracks opened within the system by broader mobilization, from the rise of the workers' movement to anti-colonial wars and anti-war movements. This is not our scenario today. In several countries, the feminist movement is currently the only coordinated movement on a national scale, and the mobilization around March 8's strike is the only internationally coordinated mass-mobilization currently taking place. This feminist mobilization is, therefore, at the forefront of the struggle, often in extremely difficult social and political conditions. This raises a number of challenges — for example, how to sustain the movement in the long run in the absence of a wider social activation — but it also opens the possibility for a new kind of class recomposition, *if* the feminist movement will manage to expand to involve other social and political agents: one that binds together struggle around production and social reproduction and that better reflects and articulates an increasingly feminized and racialized global working class. ■

# VOICES FROM THE WOMEN'S STRIKE ASSEMBLY



Shiri Shalmy

Women's Strike Assembly, UK

- ▶ **INSPIRED BY THE** actions of hundreds of thousands of women across the globe that took action on March 8th in 2017 and the movements for the right to abortions in Poland and Ireland, women in the UK have called for a women's strike on March 8th 2018.

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With active assemblies of women organising so far in London and Birmingham, and dozens of organisations and base unions endorsing the strike, the prospect of developing a deeper resonance with wider layers of working class women is closer to materialising. The purpose of the Women's Strike is to expose, challenge and destroy a system that uses the oppression and domination of women as an organising principle. It is to highlight how neoliberal identity politics is used to pit us against each other in order to stop us from organising. The goal is also to make the connection between feminism, class and race and acknowledge that in order to create a world where women are equal, we need to tackle these issues too. It is to force into the conversation the idea of reproductive labour, not just because we work for less or no pay, but because our free labour is sustaining a system that is set against us. It is to demand our humans rights, not the equal right to be oppressed under capitalism. And it is to demonstrate the collective power 51% of the population already holds, through withdrawing our labour, care and participation in the economy. It is to disrupt business as usual.

The time is perfect — the system that once seemed invincible is in crisis and the fractures are already visible: in the UK a Tory government is clinging to power while making bad decisions increasingly worst; Fascism is rising and made it into the White House, but this also dragged the conversation about it into the mainstream; and women around the world found a new voice in #metoo and a new channel for action in #timesup. It is an opportunity, for once, to use a moment of crisis to our advantage and the Women's Strike is part of it.

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Faced with years of decaying rights for workers to strike, most recently in the form of the Trade Union Act 2016 and a declining union membership, the strike is invoked as a necessary and political form of action that it is often seen as an impossibility and therefore a privilege. However the fact that this is a strike and ▶

- ▶ not a march is intentional. The strike is a disruptive, rather than symbolic, action, designed to interfere with regular production and hit capitalism where it hurts.

The Women's Strike aims to expand this idea of production and include social reproduction as a potential site for disruption — walking out of the kitchens and nurseries, the care homes and the bedrooms, where women work, often for free, to sustain capitalism. As this work is not monetised it is usually difficult to notice — even by the people who perform it, never mind the ones who got used to benefitting from it for free.

## “THE FACT THAT THIS IS A STRIKE AND NOT A MARCH IS INTENTIONAL”

It is even harder to organise around it in this current atmosphere of economic emergency, widespread precarity and anti-union sentiments, when even the basic rights of people at traditional workplaces are under attack. We are therefore very pleased to be collaborating on the 8 March strike with a number of independent grassroots trade unions representing low waged migrant workers, many of whom are women, linking the struggle at work to the struggle at home and using the strategy of the strike to disrupt both. Other endorsements came from businesses who will close on the day (or at least officially acknowledge women employee's strike action), with some also donating income generated on the day towards the strike fund. The women's Strike aims to bring together the demands of women in and out of paid work, of disabled and migrant women, of women who work at home through choice or through circumstances and of women on benefits.

We acknowledge the impossibility of going on strike for many women and devised a list of tactics women can use on the day — from wearing red at work to hanging a banner at home, joining or organising an assembly to a traditional walk out or taking part in a range of direct actions planned for the day.

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We have seen over past few years a rise in authoritarian and right-wing populist movements across and beyond Europe. Some of

these movement alliances have been formed in a short time, in reaction to mass migration from the Syrian and wider middle-eastern region conflicts. The context of feminism in the west has been one of struggling against patriarchal violence and traditional divisions of gender roles. At the same time, sexual violence has become in the media spot light with the #metoo campaign, that has also had a right-wing backlash, along with myths around there being no gender-pay gap, men's rights and transphobia.

We need establish and clarify that the protection of women was never the real motivation behind these right-wing campaigns. The ideology that informs anti-immigrants actions is the same loose ideology that informs the oppression and domination of women, namely, anything to maintain the privileges of powerful groups and their ability to extract resources. The capitalist class will create different narratives ('war on Terror', 'War on Drugs', 'bringing democracy to the Middle East', etc.) to present their holding on to power in agreeable ways and, supposedly, in public interest.

The way the Women's Strike organises against both racism and men's self victimisation is through ensuring that the conversation covers all aspects of women's experience — from housing to education, mental health to immigration, labour rights and reproductive rights — and that all these issues are at the forefront as feminist issues, not separate social issues. In practice we do this through a series of events looking at race, welfare reforms, labour struggles and the condition of trans women. We make sure we reach out to the most marginalised groups (migrant women, sex workers, women in precarious housing) and put them at the centre of our campaign — not as an afterthought. We also make sure to build solidarity with women fighting around the world — from Argentina to Rojava — and link up our struggle to theirs to highlight the link between capitalist exploitation and the oppression of women.

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We expect the Women's strike, formed in the way it has, with limited means and an increasingly demobilising climate against forms of autonomous action, to be a necessary first step in laying the ground work for a new feminism, a new layer of radically consciousness women, that not only speaks of our present conjuncture but concrete acts to change it. ■



# WHAT IS THE TSS PLATFORM?

The Transnational Social Strike (TSS) Platform aims at involving different kinds of workers – women and men, those employed in factories, those who experience the normality of precarity, locals and migrants – in a political process against subordination and exploitation. It is open to workers, groups and unions across Europe and beyond that share a common goal.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL STRIKE & WHY TO START A PROCESS TOWARDS THIS GOAL?

We experience every day that things in the workplaces and in society have changed. Organization of labor struggles is weakened by the divisions between those who work in the same hub, factory, school, call center etc. Solidarity is challenged by the differences of contracts, time of employment, political conditions such as residence permits or welfare rights. Labour disputing is more and more difficult and it is often not enough to stop the increasing precarization. National divisions imposed on labor obstruct the capacity to fight back against the transnational dimension of production and exploitation. As a result, a little conquest by one can sometimes be a loss for many others: be they workers in other countries with lower wages and income or temp workers in the same factory, young interns or migrants and refugees forced to work for free to get their visa.

The TSS process is born from the assumption that there is no technical way out to this situation: only a political movement can overturn the state of affairs according to which we are just numbers and shares in the balance sheets of the European technocrats and capitalists. The strike is for us the name of a power that aims at damaging the pillars on which this unequal and unjust society is grounded. Building the conditions to exercise this power is what we need in order to overthrow the current state of subordination to employers and politicians.





## THEREFORE TODAY THE STRIKE NEEDS TO BE TRANSNATIONAL AND SOCIAL.

Transnational because capital works and thinks transnationally, creating divisions among countries, wages and working conditions to weaken us and make profits. Only by facing and overturning these divisions we can aspire at increasing our power and make ourselves heard. In this, we refuse to be labeled either as anti-eu or pro-eu: we deem insufficient to organize at the national level, as the transnational dimension is our battlefield and Europe is for us a common space of organization where to find allies and enemies.

Social because the power of the strike cannot be restricted to some categories of workers, trade unions or groups of supporters. The strike is a weapon that everyone has to be able to hold and use throughout society: even those who are constantly changing jobs, the migrants who risk their residence permit, the students and the unemployed. The strike can become for them a chance to be in the frontline, to organize and to overthrow the political conditions of exploitation. There must be no exclusion from the strike movement: this is the basis of our understanding of solidarity and social strike.

The TSS Platform is a political infrastructure to confront these challenges. It is a reservoir of experiences and tactics to politicize labor struggles, to connect social and labour struggles, and make their claims heard well beyond each group's and union's capacity. It is a space of organization, communication and encounter where different figures of labour can think together about how to develop a common discourse, how to support common European claims capable of being instruments of emancipation and how to build the conditions of possibility of the transnational social strike.

**WWW.TRANSNATIONAL-STRIKE.INFO**

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