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European journal for alternative thinking and political dialogue

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**International
Women's Day –
100 years of struggle**

**Speeches of the International Women's
Conference in Copenhagen,
March 6 – 7, 2010**

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Preface

The international women's conference in Copenhagen on March 6 – 7, 2010, was organized to mark the 100 years of the International Women's Day, which was proposed by Clara Zetkin and decided at a women's conference in Copenhagen in 1910, in connection with the conference of the Second International in the city.

The women's conference in 2010 was organized by the Women's Committee of Enhedslisten/the Red-Green Alliance in cooperation with EL-FEM, the European Left women's network. Organising this event was made possible to organize – in particular to facilitate the participation of many EL-FEM women – with the financial support of the European Left. The speakers and participants came from a wide variety of countries: Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Cyprus, and Iraq/Britain.

As organizers of the conference we are very grateful that the “transform!europe” network has offered to publish the speeches of the conference in a booklet to make it possible for them to be read by a wider audience. These speeches will not only inspire, but can also be used in the future discussions and work among feminists and the radical left.

Eight competent speakers covered an overview of the achievements of women over the past 100 years, but were concentrating on the main focus points of the women's struggle of today. It was concluded that there had certainly been gains – the vote, equal rights and gender equality in legislation – but that very many of these gains have not been put into effect. At the same time women of today are faced with huge problems such as wide-spread poverty on a global scale, economic crisis and the economic liberalization of and attack on public welfare, the unchanging gender pay gap, low representation in parliaments, councils and boards, trafficking, war and oppression.

The speeches and the ensuing broad discussions among the participants of the conference underlined the necessity to continue the debate with regard to several topics, which are of crucial importance in the women's struggle ahead. The speakers and the participants were not in agreement on some of the issues mentioned here, which makes it all the more important to continue the discussion:

- The need to reclaim feminism as a crucial part of socialism – to develop Marxist/socialist feminism as the ideology of liberation of socialist and progressive women of today and to integrate it into radical left/socialist parties and organizations. The historical conflict between Marxism and feminism has been very detrimental to both fights but above all for feminism, which suffered systematic subordination to the labour movement.
- There will be no socialism without democracy and no democracy without women. A discussion about the nation state as a reactionary construction was raised and it is worth continuing to work more with the arguments. But can a welfare state be organized without a nation state?
- An interesting discussion took place on the right to vote – one of the primary gains originating in the women's conference in Copenhagen of 1910 – and on how to politicize the issue of political participation: Does this mean working in opposition to the system or working inside it (a parliamentary system).
- The controversial ideas of Frigga Haug that women are not only victims but have a share in their own oppression (reproducing the social conditions they are in).
- How to view the issue of labour and women at a time of neo-liberalism and dissolution of the family. This question was also seen in relation to the discussion about Marx' concept of labour and that of the feminist movement of the 1970s and '80s, which raised the important issue of expanding the concept of work – i.e. to housework, reproductive work, which officially is not considered “productive” work, because it does not produce any surplus value.
- The use of quotas and the empowering of women in other ways. Quotas are useful for both sexes. Quotas as a tool of gender mainstreaming are a tool of law and procedures, but it takes much longer to change the way people think and the culture they live in than it takes to change the law.
- The public welfare system and the need to preserve it in order to promote gender equality and the economic independence of women as opposed to financial and multinational capitalism – a male system.
- Awareness of the neo-liberal strategy and its undermining of democracy and strengthening of militarization – the dangers that it presents to women and the working class movement. Can women create a feminist peace movement to counter increasing militarization, surveillance and the undermining of democracy in this connection?

- The EU 2020 strategy aims at undermining effectively the public sector and to privatize in a lot harsher and more fundamental way than previously; this should also be seen in connection with the conclusions that the public welfare sector contributes to support and liberate women. This EU-strategy is a male strategy. What can women do about this?
- How to fight trafficking – focusing on where the money is made. On the one hand it is important to combine the work to reduce trafficking and prostitution with an effort to improve social conditions because women are forced into trafficking and prostitution because they are poor. But can prohibiting the buying of sex also be one of the means to fight trafficking and prostitution? There were conflicting as sex workers whose work conditions should be improved and protected. This is a difficult discussion, which needs to be pursued in a way, that advances women’s rights and lives and does not deepen the gap between feminist views.
- Is “state-feminism” transformative or counterproductive? Can “small steps” and legislation be used to promote equal rights, equal pay in real life today? State feminism can’t fundamentally change society. On the other hand something can be done, for example, about sexual harassment, originating in the patriarchal system, without any fundamental change of society. Something can be done about the pay gap by trade unions, for example. Quotas can be used to strengthen democratization and have more women in parliaments.
- Is “state feminism” counterproductive in the sense that it demobilizes the grassroots, while they are waiting for a decision by the court? The grassroots have to be numerous, strong and offensive for state feminists to have any chance to change anything. State feminism needs grassroots pressure. The same applies to gender mainstreaming, a central EU-policy.
- How to contribute to changing the situation of women in Iraq and elsewhere by women’s movements in the industrialized world. A discussion about war, conflict, and women and how to build a feminist peace movement needs to be pursued, which can also combine with the struggle of women in war and conflict zones in the Global South. There is also an important discussion on the role of religion/repressive regimes with regard to women, and how to support oppressed women in the South. Global solidarity between women should be reformulated before this background and made much more concrete.

We hope that with the publication of this booklet by “transform” we will have provided the tools to intensify the future work of EL-FEM and many other women’s networks and organizations – as well as European left parties.

International Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark 1910 and 2010.

Introduction

Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen

100 years ago the Congress of the Second International took place in Copenhagen, as well as the Socialist Women's Conference, which decided that an International Women's Day should be held every year. This was proposed by the German socialist Clara Zetkin, a prominent advocate of women's rights. The conference took place in the now demolished Workers' Community Centre, later well-known as "Ungdomshuset" ("Youth House"). 100 years ago these women fought for equal rights and equal opportunities for women all over the world. They were well aware that this struggle was international. The annual International Women's Day stresses the importance of a continued focus on women's rights and women's liberation. But they did more than that, 100 years ago in Copenhagen. Besides announcing an annual International Women's Day, the conference also discussed the following topics:

- the struggle for women's suffrage
- the development of an International Women's Movement
- the struggle for the welfare of women and children

Denmark was fortunate to be the place where the International Women's Day was proclaimed. But how are we – Danish women – doing today? In 1915 women here gained the vote in general elections. But now, the majority of representatives at both national and municipal level are still men.

Clara Zetkin believed that the liberation and equality of women is based on economic independence. The Danish Equal Pay Act was passed in 1976. But the pay gap between Danish men and women is still at 18 %.

The International Women's Day on 8 March was declared by the UN in 1975 and the UN- *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* in 1979. But still a lot of women all over the world – including in Denmark – live in poverty, oppression and in fear of violence.

Today the struggle for equal rights has been taken hostage by the right wing parties and people in their attacks against Danish minorities. They claim that Danish women have achieved equal rights – except for Danish Muslim women who are all pictured as oppressed by their Muslim men. And that is sadly not only happening in Denmark but also in many other countries. They ignore the still existing pay gap between men and women, ignore that economic and political power is still monopolized by men, and finally ignore that women are victims of violence regardless of religion or culture.

100 years have passed, but we have not achieved equal rights. Neither have we achieved equal opportunities – nor liberation. But we will keep on fighting for another 100 years, if necessary!

Women's Rights 100 Years After

Years of Struggle for Suffrage, Political Participation,
Democracy and against Capitalism

Sandra Beyer

In 1910, in August, some 100 women from over 17 nations met here in Copenhagen to demand equal rights for men and for women. Clara Zetkin and others did not ask for special rights, but human rights.

When I prepared this text, I struggled with the question of how to comprise 100 years into a few words. The topic of this conference is “International Women’s Day – 100 Years of Struggle”. But struggle is not a battle or a fight. It does not denote something heroic; it means constant and persistent resistance against social inequities and structures of discrimination. Over hundred years we have had to face failures, setbacks and beautiful triumphs. We are here to celebrate our victories and to discuss what we have to do in the 21st century. Participation means asking and being critical towards the answers and those giving them. With every new question and answer we will voice our visions of an equal society.

I put forward to you some questions I had to face when I was preparing my contribution to this conference. Over the last century we and our sisters have had to struggle with the issues of equality at work as well as at home, and we are still struggling for the right to choose and thus the right over our own bodies and sexuality, against violence and discrimination. Susanne Empacher (CP of Austria and EL-fem) will discuss the issues raised one hundred years ago and their impact on European societies in her text “Socialism and Feminism”. She will try to present once more our political views on an equal and emancipatory society based on Marxist thinking and give a historic overview on women’s struggles.

One of the demands put forward since the 19th century has been the right to raise our voices and speak for ourselves. In 1910, the central demand was the right to vote and thus the right of political participation. However, it is still an issue today, how to politicize and radicalize the question of universal suffrage. When women are granted the right to vote they finally become fully-recognized citizens of a nation-state, because suffrage means citizenship within the borders

of a governmental body. Women in Europe were mostly granted the right to vote after the First World War, as they had proven themselves to be loyal and patriotic citizens.¹ But citizenship also means discrimination and exclusion. How do we as socialist feminists deal with the question of political participation beyond the borders of states or the EU?

Another question is how to address the issue of the vote and political participation within the confines of modern capitalist societies. The right to vote does not necessarily mean that a democratic and emancipatory society is purported. But we do support the neoliberal system of representative democracies in Europe if we simply attend elections without discussing how we think democracy as a system. Working within parliamentary systems poses the question of coalition with and opposition to partners that support capitalist societies. Here, we will have Drífa Snædal from Iceland telling us how a socialist coalition can face the consequences of the economic crisis and change the system at the same time in her contribution “Iceland: Women and Crisis”. Drude Dahlerup, feminist researcher and professor at the University of Stockholm, will give a tentative answer to the question if feminism and the state can be thought together in “Is ‘State-Feminism’ Transformative or in Fact Counterproductive?” She and other “femocrats” use legislation and state bodies to get women into decision-making processes. Laws like the CEDAW² can be instigated more easily with women being involved in the implementation. However, if we consider the state as a frame to protect and support women at work and at home, would we not rely too heavily on structures essentially patriarchal and paternalistic? This is the ‘old’ question of women’s liberation, raised again in the 21st century: the question of either participation in or opposition to capitalist societies.

The question of political struggle and participation even touches the discussion of whom to represent and in what way. Line Barfod will address modern slavery, not only trafficking, of women and children in neoliberal capitalist society in Denmark. In “Trafficking – Women and Children as the Slaves of Today”, she will discuss the demand of us Europeans for cheap labour and sexwork and how the production conditions of the sex industry are thus perpetuated. However, how are we to deal with demands of sex workers themselves? How can we address the issues of capitalist means of production without discriminating against these women (and sometimes men)? In the EL-FEM

1 In Norway, we were allowed to vote as early as 1913, in Denmark in 1915. In France, universal suffrage was granted in 1945. Restrictions were lifted in 1975 in Portugal after the end of the dictatorship. Switzerland was the last European country to grant women the right to vote in all cantons in 1990. How democratic the countries were and consequently how much worth the right to vote actually had will not be raised here. We still have to discuss our socialist past and thus our vision of a socialist and emancipatory society in the future.

2 CEDAW – The “Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women” is an international convention adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

conference on violence against women in Trieste in October 2006³ sex-workers demanded to be heard. Do we deny women to speak for themselves and for their needs? How are we to deal with issues of sexuality and power relations in prostitution? As slavery and particularly trafficking raise the question of gender and production, we have to discuss both with the women involved. The same applies to porn, as there is something as seemingly contradictory as “feminist porn”. I would argue that forbidding films of and about the sexual exploitation of women, which basically is mainstream porn today, does not abolish the structures of power and the means of production within this capitalist and thus patriarchal industry. Since the 1980s women have tried to establish an industry for sex themselves. Porn essentially plays with the voyeuristic tendencies in all human beings; to abolish films about the variety and perversity of human sexuality is asking the wrong questions and asking the wrong people. As long as we only attack the male-oriented definition of women in porn, we will not tackle the issues of capitalist production that defines people by their bodies and thus by their ability to function.

To look beyond European borders, Gona Saed from the Middle East Centre for Women’s Rights, London, will discuss “Women in Armed Conflict Areas” in Iraq. She shows us how shockingly little we as European socialist and communist feminists know about the struggles of our sisters outside Europe. She makes perfectly clear that our ideologies and opinions about how a (European) society should be, can make us deaf to specific demands of women in Iraq. Their voices must be heard. Thus, we cannot decide to represent others but have to make sure these women can talk without using them as perfect excuses for our ideologies.⁴ Women’s rights are human rights and thus universal, they cannot be gained for others but only together with them. According to the old feminist credo of self-empowerment, we as women have to make ourselves heard, but not speak for each other. It is, however, dangerous to consider people as a group from the outside. To determine people by their ethnicity or citizenship, for instance, denies differences within a group. The worker of the 21st century is not the one Marx saw 150 years ago in the factories in Manchester and elsewhere. Beyond the confines of borders we will have to discuss class in the context of gender and ecology. As far as I understand the term “class” now, we cannot discuss it as a monolithic entity anymore. Individuals must be acknowledged in their political and social needs, thus for instance as members of the working class but at the same time as having a self-determined gender, social background and needs for a better life. Moreover, we have to consider class once again internationally. The industries we preserve for our working class

3 The brochure “No Violence against Women” of the conference can be ordered from the headquarters of the European Left-Party in Brussels.

4 One prominent example in Germany, for instance, currently is the discussion about the head scarf. Is it really her own free choice if a woman decides to wear it in public and at work? Do we discuss the issue with the women involved or only about them?

comrades here today will cause natural catastrophes and hunger at the other end of the world tomorrow.

In the 21st century we have to ask ourselves how we are able to participate politically if social legislation is increasingly preventing people from doing so. The European Court of Justice declared minimal social standards for agreements and contractors illegal in several consecutive cases in 2007 and 2008⁵ as they would prevent competition between companies working all over Europe. Unions are not able to fight for the rights of workers and employees across state borders.

If people see no alternative within parliamentary systems for which they can vote, the right to participate loses its value. And as poverty increasingly excludes people from being part of society, e.g., because of shame due to discrimination against people on social benefits or because of immobility due to prices of public transport, the vote becomes a matter of money and economic power. Without material security the right to vote becomes the right to choose your way into poverty. Political participation and thus democracy become hollow concepts. Social insecurity becomes one of the biggest dangers to democracy in the end. Freedom is nothing without the liberty to choose your way of life independently.

In the end, we as socialist, Marxist and communist feminists have to face the question of our vision of a good life and of how we want to reach this very goal. We have to think about our means of political participation, of the structures we ourselves build every day to discuss our dreams and our political aims. We have to go beyond the concept of citizenship and pre-defined groups, hence I

5 "Case C-438/05, *Viking Line v ITF* (11 December 2007). The Court held that although protected by domestic labour law (in that case the Finnish Constitution), industrial action may be unlawful under EU-law if it breaches the terms of the EC-Treaty, Article 43. The case concerned industrial action by Finnish unions and the ITF against a Finnish company proposing to re-flag in Estonia, where terms of employment were lower than in Finland.

Case C-341/05, *Laval v Svenska Byggnadsarbetareförbundet* (18 December 2007). The Court held that, although protected by Swedish national law, (i) industrial action by Swedish unions, (ii) designed to compel a Latvian contractor to pay Swedish rates determined by a Swedish collective agreement to his Latvian workers employed on Swedish building sites (iii) may be unlawful under EU-law if it breaches the terms of the EC-Treaty, article 49.

Case C 346/06, *Ruffert v Land Niedersachsen* (3 April 2008) The Court held that a Polish sub-contractor: (i) could not be required by the law of Lower Saxony, (ii) to pay his workers posted from Poland, (iii) the terms of a collective agreement in force, at a site where the work was being carried out. Such a requirement (even though imposed by law) was held to breach the provisions of the Posted Workers' Directive.

Case C-319/06, *Commission v Luxembourg* (19 June 2008) The Court held that the government of Luxembourg had acted in breach of EC-Treaty, Article 49, and the Posted Workers' Directive, on a number of grounds. The Court effectively held that the Directive was both a floor and a ceiling, and that it was not possible in that case to require by legislation adherence to collective agreements other than those covered by Article 3(8) of the Directive."

See Keith Ewing: *Decisions of the European Court of Justice: Implications for UK labour law*. The Institute of Employment Rights, 2009.

pleaded for a flexible definition of class. Finally, we will call the whole capitalist system into question. And this cannot be done without struggle and a revolution in thinking and in our ways of participating. We are going to face angry resistance, but I believe in our strength and courage to move on persistently.

Socialism and feminism

Susanne Empacher

The task to write on the topic of socialism and feminism is a great challenge, both theoretically and from the perspective of practice. It was already a challenge to prepare this article next to my bread-winning job as a secretary to a lawyer and not as a researcher. Sitting in front of a heap of feminist literature I tried to find my thread through the topic and to bind it to one or another question. I tried to remember my first steps in the women's movement and in the communist movement, because this, too, is part of the relationship I will be talking about here.

Dealing with the question of the relationship between socialism and feminism has taken me back to my personal political socialisation. Therefore I want to present some spotlights that I think are important, because the relationship between socialism and feminism can also be described as one with a personal aspect.

When I took up my studies of history at the University of Vienna, the teaching was still characterised by a male perspective and by male dominance. A great number of female students was confronted with a minority of female teachers. Women's studies and women as university professors were important claims we made at that time. There were still many blind spots in the field of historical studies, but not only there. The discussion about women's role in history was just about to begin, making women visible was a first step, and questioning of the taken-for-granted relationship between the general and the specific and the hierarchy of what was important. Spaces for these discussions were women's groups and seminars. Only in small steps we as women managed to conquer our feminist fields of activity in teaching and in research, in institutions and in projects. If they existed at all, women's groups were still outside the general political debates and played a minor role in left organisations. Too big was the scepticism regarding women's groups, because they served the exchange of experiences and theories among women and represented networks for women.

My decision to join the Communist Students' Association in 1981 led to my theoretical and practical separation from many of my female colleagues. What separated us were unbridgeable differences concerning the perspective of socialism, while the political practice in Marxist organisations and in the real socialist countries being one that was hostile to women contributed its share.

One hundred years after the proclamation of the International Women's Day I / we look back on a many-layered struggle against the oppression of women, for equality of the sexes and the liberation of women. We / I see an abundance of theoretical concepts for women's liberation, a passionate controversy among women, progress and roll-backs of women's movements. It is a challenge to speak about the question of the breakdown of real socialism. Since also feminism contained a socialist hope for a new society, it had to be disposed of after 1989.

The term of "feminism" is still a provocation which evokes the most abstruse of associations. On the one hand, some people think that feminism is a hysterical battle-cry directed against all men, or something like the ideology of a lesbian way of living or simply another expression for "women's policy". On the other hand it seems appropriate to use this term again. So, not such a long time ago, the Austrian minister for economy, Martin Bartenstein (from the conservative People's Party) was quoted with the slogan "We need a new feminism" in a daily paper and meant an increase of child care institutions by that. All of a sudden, feminism is "in" again, at least in the educated circles of the liberal German feuilleton, where they speak of "alpha-girls". The new feminist trend, however, must be seen within the context of completely different ideas of the relations between the sexes. (Keywords in the debate are Eva Hermann's rambling burp of a "mother cross" and the discrediting of gender mainstreaming). The struggle for what is and should be equality between man and woman, liberation and emancipation of women, the struggle for hegemony and the power to define reality in gender politics is present again.

If conservatives are claiming the term for themselves it is high time for us to reclaim it from its arbitrary use and to contextualise it again due to its historical origins, its theory and its practices.

If we understand socialist feminism as an ensemble of theories and social struggles for emancipation in patriarchal relations between the sexes, we can find the traces of such thinking and acting in the period of the European Enlightenment of the 18th century and in the French Revolution. Olympe de Gouche in France and Mary Wollstonecraft in England filled this term with concrete claims for equal rights and liberties for both men and women, individual rights for women within marriage, the right to get a divorce, the right to vote, the right for property and education. These are all claims which were

taken up again in the 19th and 20th centuries on a global scale, claims which since then have never left the political agenda.

Already before the French Revolution, women organised as individuals but also collectively in the entire world. Women organising and forming social movements is a product of the modernist age. Since the middle of the 19th century women have been integrated into the capitalist production process in terms of masses. In the context of this process the bourgeois and the proletarian women's movements came into existence. After the collapse of feudal structures, the bourgeois women's movement originated from the urban middle class fighting for class-based reforms, for access to an extended range of professions for members of their classes but also for the right to vote for bourgeois women. The proletarian women's movement comprised women who took part in national and revolutionary movements. Especially in the struggle against World War I the dividing-lines between these two movements broke open only to close again for cooperation – after World War I, the right to vote could be accomplished by and for both groups in most European countries.

Let's jump into the 1960s. The Fordist age required masses of women to be included into the education system. The reform of the education system in favour of women corresponded to the requirements of capital in the period of its transition from its expansive to its intensive phase during the scientific-technological revolution. Thus equipped with new knowledge, the feminist movements were experiencing a rapid boom with three trends that can be identified:

The mainstream was formed by its liberal-feminist variation, which found its expression in the World Women's Conferences from 1975 onwards. These alliances were at first spearheaded by educated white women from the middle-classes and had the state and reformist politics as their points of reference.

Another trend in so-called western feminism was represented by the socialist women's liberation movement, which had its roots in the new Left and was strongly influenced by Marxism, which means that they saw the roots of the suppression of women in capitalism.

And, thirdly, there were those women, who claimed that the roots of women's suppression lay in patriarchy, who joined in the autonomous women's movement and who formulated a fundamental criticism of culture.

If we put together all these theories and practices, feminism can be described as

- an ensemble of debates and critical insights on the one hand;
- as concrete social struggles and emancipatory movements with the goal of a society free of domination and of patriarchy on the other hand.

And therefore feminist politics is left or it is not feminist.

But in spite of this, why has it always been so difficult to connect left and feminist politics?

Until the 1980s, Marxist movements and debates have – in a one-sided manner – put their emphasis on the contradiction between capital and labour, sexist, but also racist and ecological contradictions remained subordinated. In turn, the reaction by the New Women's Movement was another one-sided one, namely to put the focus on the difference between the sexes. It remains their great merit to have founded the category of sex.

Only in the 1990s, with the backlash against women setting in, the social and ethnical differences have moved into the focus of feminist movements and debates. Today establishing a link between left, Marxist and feminist and anti-racist analyses and orientations is more urgent than ever before.

Which ones were the major controversies within the feminist movements in the Fordist age? And wherein does the major challenge consist today?

I would like to start with the feminist struggle against patriarchal policies since the 1970s, with the controversy about the policy of representation. The search for women as self-conscious subjects of history could find fulfilment neither in socialist politics of representation nor in feminist attributing the blame on an all-mighty patriarchy. The “thesis of woman as victim and wrongdoer” proposed by Frigga Haug at the end of the 1970s which raised the question if women were not having a share in their own suppression and thus in the reproduction of social conditions, caused immense uproar in left contexts. By fundamentally questioning the practice of sisterhood and contrasting it to the concept of self-empowerment it has until the present day been a trigger for discussion and has lost none of its topicality. It is an appeal for a completely different understanding of politics in which Haug refers to Marx, namely to his sixth thesis on Feuerbach, which says that “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations”. And she also adopts another thesis by Marx contained in his work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where he writes that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”

This means that we as women are what we find in society and what we appropriate. We do not make our history as we please, but we make it ourselves. For developing feminist options of acting, we as women must analyse what

we find and perhaps also if and in which respects we reproduce our own suppression.

The question remains: How do we as women appropriate the conditions of our lives, do we do it with self-assurance, do we act in resistance, do we do it as opportunists or do we struggle to become the social beings as which we know ourselves?

A second point of controversy arose around the question of expanding the concept of work. Feminist movements opened up our perspective to the entire range of work that needs to be done in society by introducing into the debate the topic of housework, reproductive work and work in the family.

But until today it seems to be difficult to grasp that there is work that amounts to half of all the work done in a society, which is performed by more than half of the population but still remains outside all considerations and calculations. In the theoretical literature on this topic there was an endless number of attempts of asking if this work was productive or not.

In the beginning there was a critique of Marxist value theory and the concept of labour inherent in it. There were quite a few who thought that Marx had said that housework was not productive work. Rather it is true that Marx wrote that from the point-of-view of capital every kind of work is unproductive as long as it does not produce any surplus value. This is an important difference. Feminist Marxists countered with the question if it were correct at all that housework does not create any surplus value, since with the housework women performed, they contributed to the production of the commodity of the labour force, which was the source of surplus value. An in-depth discussion of the question did not reach any noteworthy insights. The claim for payment for housework which was playing a role for a short time, was soon abandoned, because it was recognized what would happen if the Right adopted it, namely to oust women from the official labour market into unprotected and precarious labour situations or to work in the home.

If we consider the entire work that is necessary for the functioning of society, we see that the theoreticians of neo-liberalism are wrong when they say that we are running out of work, but that the payment is becoming less and less or that there is no payment at all – long live volunteer community-oriented work! Labour and the labour society are not in a crisis, because there is not a sufficient amount of work, but because work is primarily understood as industrial work for the production of goods and because the distribution of this kind of work and its influence on shaping the labour relations is limited to one sex mostly. The crucial question is not whether there is enough paid work to allow self-reliant existence for all human beings, but how work is distributed and evaluated. In the face of the present-day dramatic global processes and the econom-

ic developments accompanying it, in the face of unemployment, poverty and lack of orientation but also with regard to the growing wish of human beings to participate in society and to secure their livelihood through self-determined work, it is important to develop concepts of how the small amount of paid work and the growing amount of unpaid work can be equally distributed among more people. Shortening the normal working time in the productive sector alone will not suffice. Also by attributing a higher value to the work performed in the sphere of reproduction without changing the division and organisation of labour, the problems of enforced modernisation, individualisation and destruction of the environment cannot be solved.

Eventually the goal is the abolition of alienated work in all spheres and the participation of women and men in life as a whole. In the future we must question and eventually overcome the traditional division of economic and extra-economic spheres and their respective attribution to the sexes. From this we can deduct the changes necessary in the working world, in communities and in households so that women and men can meet at equal levels. Nothing less than the revocation of a social contract is at stake, which is based on a global economy resting on the pillars of growth which destroys the environment, of full employment based on paid work and on sexist division of labour.

Everything that cannot be accelerated, automatised and rationalised and thus does not yield enough profit and cannot be adapted to the requirements of the market, must be performed by human beings. Marx called this the economy of time according to which the capitalist mode of production is regulated and his vision was a reduction of the working time as a consequence of industrial development, so that in the end there would be more time left for self-development and the development of cultural and truly human capacities. But if organised capitalistically, the economy of time leads to increasing the division of society and to lack of time for human development.

To understand the relations between the sexes as productive relations is the central idea in Frigga Haug's theory, which I would like to present here in greater detail.

Relations of production – this is the idea in Marx of how people produce their lives. Marx writes that human beings do this in a double way, they produce their own lives and the lives of others. Producing the lives of others happens in procreation, whereas people produce their own lives by developing and reproducing themselves as human beings in that process. They do this by producing food and goods. This means that right from the start there are two modes of production. Another idea is that the production of life, of both one's own and the lives of others is a social and a natural relation. From this, Marx concludes that the

respective mode of production is always connected with a specific mode of interaction or social stage in the context of which it has to be regarded. Seen from that point-of-view, the history of mankind is one of the development of industry and of exchange of labour. At this point Frigga Haug sets in and asks why Marx does not go the one logical step further, that namely the history of industry and of exchange of labour must be studied together with the history of the natural social relation, of procreation, which means together with the question of family and population politics. This perspective implies opening one's eyes to the constructions of what is natural, of what sexes should be, to how these questions are supported and upheld by morals, ideology and symbols, how these are organised and thus opens the view to patriarchal structures.

Frigga Haug advocates inscribing feminism into the core of Marxism, by integrating it into the central Marxian concept of the relations of production, which describes how human beings are producing their lives.

For the women's movement the family was the place where girls are socialised so that they comply with the division of labour between housewife and employed husband, that they shape their bodies, enslave their senses and do not develop their capacities. We regarded the family as the place where women's oppression took place, where domination was prolonged which led us to the conclusion that women needed to overturn the institution of the family. The women's movement wanted to abolish the family. Instead neo-liberalism is doing that. Basically, there is hardly any family left. There are no longer any foundations for the bourgeois family, since the model of the male bread-winner has no longer any material substance. Sexual expectations and modes of behaviour have changed, there is a new relationship between work and the home.

Frigga Haug demands that we take up the struggle for a new human being. She presented a theoretical work, "The Four-in-One Perspective", a utopia of women, which is a utopia for all and states that it is high time to leave behind us the false alternatives, which paralyse politics and render it boring. Do we want to fight for childcare grants for mothers or for better nursery schools? Do we want a women's quota or fight outside the parliamentary bodies? Do we want to support the trade unionist struggles for higher wages and collective agreements or do we put the claim for a basic income into the centre of our struggles? Is it possible for us to study, to develop, to enjoy culture – or do we not have any time for that, because there are more urgent things that have to be tackled such as war, hunger and environmental catastrophes?

Frigga Haug's work focuses on the utopia of a just distribution of paid work, family work, community work and chances of (self-)development. She creates a compass which arranges the four spheres in one context and which contains

the potential of combining a “real political” and an emancipatory-utopian approach.

She does not only open our view to the possibility of determining and shaping our own lives, which is consciously including plurality – a concept which she contextualises with emancipation and solidarity, but which can also be linked with another form of economy and property structure.

I think we are required to debate how we imagine our existence as human beings, where we want to go, who we are and we must develop new forms of co-existence here and now and invent solidarity anew. The feminist movements need a new vision of solidarity in work and life and we need small steps of adequate practice. We can only agree with Christa Wichterich when she writes that, “on the global market, international solidarity among women needs to find new ways and new instruments.”

It remains a fact, however, that 100 years after the proclamation of International Women’s Day it is not yet a matter-of-course that women participate in politics. The division of labour between the sexes and the split into the spheres of the political and the private, the public and the domestic, place women into spaces in which social incompetence is prison and comfort in one. Also in the history of the labour movement, women have not liberated themselves, they are liberated. One consequence of it is that women’s questions have been on the agenda for 100 years but are not dealt with because they are always the last points which are never dealt with for lack of time. Although it cannot be denied that there were many improvements for women in the past 100 years and many things could be achieved, in particular with regard to education and everyday life, the basic constellation of the relations between the sexes has remained unchanged so that steps back can and do take place any time. In the labour movement the political arrangement opens the possibility to men to interfere at any time and to practice political participation. For women this is not the case. If the situation of women is to improve – which it has not in the past 100 years in spite of growing wealth – we as women have to take our cause into our own hands.

We have not even reached the stage where the political interference of women is a matter-of-course. In our search for useful lessons for a politics of women we have to discover Rosa Luxemburg saying that as women have to act ourselves, otherwise we will be the objects of the actions of others.

The experience of feminism has clearly shown that the specific kind of suppression of women as an entire sex requires an independent movement, so that we can develop and keep up a collective consciousness of what it means to be a woman, even if some might regard this as separatist or autonomous.

Iceland: Women and Crisis

Drífa Snædal

There is certain arrogance in saying that Iceland is in midst of a crisis. We experience currently a recession but hardly a crisis. There is still infrastructure, kindergartens and nurseries, health services and a high level of education. Probably, very few countries are as well equipped for meeting a recession as Iceland is. There has not been any shortage of food or energy and there is a functioning democracy where you can make yourself heard without risking imprisonment or other forms of punishment. Therefore, I claim that by describing Iceland as a country in crisis one is stretching it too far. BUT we do have an economic problem and it is a big one. This problem is one we have inherited from patriarchy at its worst, a patriarchy that was left to its own by indifference for too long.

Let me go back a few decades to try to understand how a patriarchy could force a society of well-educated inhabitants into recession in just a few years. In this analysis I will, of course, put on my gender spectacles and begin when women came together and formed *Kvennalistinn*, the Women's Party of Iceland, in the early 80s. Before that we had zero to three women in parliament at a time, but this changed when women were tired of knocking on the traditional parties' doors and went for it on their own. The influence of the Women's Party was enormous. Not only did they, or should I say we, get more women into parliament. Suddenly, all other parties came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to have more women in their parliamentary groups. At that time, power within Icelandic society was to a large degree lying in the political sphere. Politicians had great power over the economy, the biggest companies were state-owned and so were Iceland's natural resources.

As happens very often, when women gain political power, the nature of power and political influence as such tends to slip away into other directions, to fields where men are dominant. This has happened all over the world with more women in politics and the declining power of small male groups within politics. This is the moment when privatization and liberalism are entering the stage! Suddenly it became unacceptable and undemocratic to have state-owned

companies (where women had some influence). Politicians all over the world sold our property to friends and families, but mostly men did so with the urge to reign and keep the power over communities, peoples and countries. This is what happened in Iceland and in many other parts of the world. At bargain prices, governments sold away what was rightfully the people's common property. Power slipped from the hands of rightfully elected women and men. In Iceland, a small society of only 300 thousand inhabitants, we saw great power move into the hands of about 30 young businessmen. These were men a little older than I am now, with big egos and high ideas for a small island, but mostly for themselves. You cannot analyze this era without thinking in gendered perspectives. I myself am educated in business administration and when I graduated I was offered a minimum wage job in a bank. At the same time, I saw my fellow male students fly high in the banking sector as soon as they had graduated. I, of course, ran out of the staff manager's office and slammed the door and instead built a career in the highly-paid sector of the women's shelters movement! As I struggled against trafficking in my new job there were rumors about crazy parties at the highest level of bank managers where prostitutes came on yachts and everything had a price tag on it, including women. Of course, this affected society as a whole. Anything was for sale and no restrictions were allowed. It was unthinkable to the right wing government to put restrictions on the right of men to buy women. At one point in time we had 12 strip joints in a population of 300 thousand inhabitants. Prostitution grew, and with this changing mentality, trafficking was allowed to grow as well in our small, liberal country. It is with great pleasure that I tell you that in the first year of the current red-green government, remarkable changes have been undertaken within the legal system and on issues regarding prostitution, domestic violence and trafficking – and there is more to come.¹

In the beginning of March we also passed a law for women quotas in the boards of bigger firms. But, of course, that is just a drop in the ocean.

The task we have before us is huge but the opportunities are also great, perhaps the greatest we have seen so far in the short history of our republic, which was proclaimed in 1944. With the recession and the collapse of our banking system a dominant international political ideology was severely hit. This is the ideology that money makes the world go round, that power is connected with masculinity and that any interference of lawmakers into the life of business is harmful. This ideology has been hit hard, but nonetheless it is, I am sorry to say, not dead yet.

Our main task as left-wing government in the coming years is to steer Icelandic society through the depression without privatizing our welfare system or our educational system. We must come through, without having to sell our resources to multinational corporations. These corporations watch every step

1 Editor's note: In March 2010, strip bars were forbidden.

we take with the look of predators in their eyes, wanting to make money off our difficulties. We will not manage to protect our society against these dangers, if we are not guided by the gender perspective.

The battle for the welfare system is closely linked to the struggle for gender equality which we have fought for in Iceland for so long. In many areas we have been rewarded. We now enjoy equality regarding parental leave and within the educational system. We also have the highest participation of women in the labor market in Europe and among the highest fertility rates as well. This we have managed on account of our welfare system. But the welfare system is not only our means for participating in society; the welfare system is also the space where women work. In Iceland we have not had unemployment in recent years. Now, suddenly, we have 10% unemployment among men and 8% among women. This has called for drastic measures – to save the men. There is a huge pressure to build more houses, make new roads and build aluminum smelters all over Iceland to save the male labor market. But this is to save the men's labor market. Our women's jobs are within the public system; in the schools, in healthcare, in social services and so on. That is why it is absolutely vital for gender equality in any economic depression to take care of the public system and welfare. Women's jobs are intricately linked to the welfare of the community, and the welfare of the community goes hand in hand with women's jobs.

But let me turn again to the opportunities the recession might give us. In Iceland, as around the world, there was a change in power relations with the collapse of the banking system. And there lie the opportunities – to shift power from the old male elites and revolutionize traditional hierarchies. The biggest danger in situations like this one is to be stuck in a traditional way of thinking, the patriarchic way of thinking, i.e., to think that women and men have the same power by having the same amount of women in government as men. This kind of head counting only gets us so far. There are leftovers from yesterday all over the place and we need to be more radical. In creating a new way of thinking we of course have to use the tools of feminism. Few -isms, I dare say, have gone further in challenging established truths and putting a question mark behind every decision. To apply feminism in crisis situations and problem solving is a very hard thing to do. We have not achieved it in Iceland or in any other country in the world for that matter. Feminism's inability to be a mainstream way of thinking is perhaps its greatest strength, after all. Feminism *has* to be radical to bite and to evolve, but radical solutions are rare in democratic societies. At least they take more time to implement than it takes to overcome a recession. Even with that knowledge I am convinced that we should never settle for slow progress. We always have to be radical, impatient and perhaps a little bit annoying. And at times even very annoying!

In our feminist reflections on women's role in creating a fair society, we have to seek strength in the women who preceded us. As I stand here, of course I think of women like Clara Zetkin and other pioneers in our battle for the em-

powerment of women. Clara Zetkin and Lenin had an ongoing debate through letters about the role of women in the revolution. Lenin, as so many men since, was convinced of the importance of women joining the battle and claimed that when socialist society had become a reality, the inequality between men and women would be history. Socialism would solve the problem and the best way for women to struggle for gender equality was to join the socialist movement. Of course, the battle for equality amongst everyone is a battle for gender equality as well, but, as we have learned over the past years, and as Clara Zetkin seemed to know, gender equality never comes without intense struggle. It can never be considered as a byproduct of anything else.

In the sixties and seventies, women were active within the socialist movement but when they got tired of making coffee for the presumed revolutionaries they embarked on their own fight. This is what happened in Iceland with the Women's Party and the Red Stocking Movement. Although working within the traditional frame of parliamentary democracy, the Women's Party was very radical in criticizing the power play in society and challenging the tendency of power ending in the hands of only few people. Maybe this is our greatest challenge, to deconstruct power, analyze it and fight against it. We have to be very aware of the danger of walking into the traps laid out for us by the patriarchic system wanting to lure us into participating in its ranks. It is easy to think that we have achieved something significant when we count equal heads of women and men. The head counting, however, is more a symbol of the real situation, not a goal in itself. We have to use all of the radical feminist tools we have, to fight for real power of women in the reconstruction after capitalism. When I talk of power, I mean the equal ability for women and men to have an impact on the society they live in and to control their own lives. This only happens with the joint forces of socialism and feminism hand in hand.

As we reconstruct a society after the ruins of capitalism it is good to bear this in mind and to learn from the experience of the heroic women before us. Never sit down and think that anything comes without a fight – not even if you are a member of a feminist party.

The Undermining of the Welfare State and Increasing Precariousness – The Consequences of Neo-Liberalism on Women in the EU and Elsewhere

Annette Groth

Poverty is Female

Out of the 1.3 billion poor in the world, 70% are women. Although 70% of the work worldwide is done by women, they do not even receive 10% of the worldwide income. In the EU, the groups with the largest poverty-risk are single mothers and families with many children.

Nearly 80 million Europeans (16% of Europe's total population) live below the poverty line, and many face serious obstacles in accessing employment, education, housing, social and financial services.

It is a scandal that in Germany – one of the richest countries in the world – the pay gap between men and women amounts to nearly 24% – for the same work. This is only topped by the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, which have a pay gap of 26.2%, and Estonia (30%). We, European women, should all go on strike to fight for equal payment, granted in numerous EU-treaties and directives.

In the current economic crisis, governments and transnational corporations aim at reducing wages, extending working hours and raising the retirement age. Germany is a very good example of this and is pushing other European countries to follow its unsocial “reforms” which were introduced in 2005. Unfortunately, neoliberal policy has been very successful and has affected our education systems, too. “Employability” is the buzz-word and our youth is being educated to fulfil the requirements of the “free market”. It is sad to observe that many girls and young women are convinced that they have the same chances on the labour market as their male colleagues, at the same time not comprehending that they are often being misused for further levelling down wages and for neoliberal ideology.

The Lisbon Strategy

In 2010, the EU should reach the objective of the Lisbon Strategy adopted in March 2000. According to this strategy, the EU should become “the world’s most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy” by 2010. One step to achieve this goal is the “modernization” of the European social model, in other words, replacing the former “welfare” state by the workfare model. If you do not accept any kind of job, you lose your entitlements to social benefits. This is why we, in particular in Germany, have wages of – for example – 1.13 € an hour for a person who works in a florist’s shop and who waited for three years to get the apprenticeship he was promised. This young male of 23 years earned 192 € a month and had been supported by his parents for 3 years before.

Another objective of the Lisbon Strategy is an increase of female employment to 60% by 2010. Yet, the very opposite is happening. The economic crisis has a very negative impact on women’s employment. In the three Baltic states, the official unemployment rate of women doubled from 2008 to 2009: in Estonia from 5.3% to 11.4%, in Lithuania from 5.6% to 10.5% and in Latvia from 6.9 to 14.4%.

As the Lisbon Strategy was not successful the EU-Commission is now following a new strategy which is called *Europe 2020, A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*.¹ The strategy aims at the implementation of more “reforms” and at advancing the flexicurity agenda. We know very well what the term of flexicurity means: less security, more flexibility. Hence, we need to be prepared to get more “reforms” and more workfare concepts. The EU-Commission calls on diverse stakeholders all around Europe to help implement those strategies.

The Services Directive

The support of so-called stakeholders such as businesses and trade unions for the Services Directive in the internal market, formally known as “Bolkestein Directive”, becomes evident if you know the revised text of the directive. All over Europe, we had strongly protested against it, but all of a sudden this protest had stopped. As revisions of the Bolkestein text were acceptable for trade unions, the directive was adopted in 2006. It should have been implemented into national law by the end of 2009. However, only nine out of the 27 member states have so far met the deadline: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The Commission hopes that the member states will have the directive in place before the summer of 2010.

1 See: http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm

What are the major critical aspects of the “Services Directive”? The only requirements to be fulfilled by a service provider concern public policy, public security, public health and the protection of the environment. If a service provider jeopardizes these aspects, he may be prohibited to open a business in a member state. In addition, the government concerned must prove that the reasons for the prohibition are “non-discriminatory, necessary and proportional”.

Original documents stating the professional background of a service provider are not required. This equally applies for documents of workers who are employed by a foreign provider.

The directive applies to both private professionals and businesses.

These include:

- **Services of general economic interest.** Typically, the definition includes postal services, water supply, electricity and waste treatment and **business services** such as management consultancies, certification and testing, facilities management (including office maintenance and security), advertising, recruiting, services of intellectual property rights and services of commercial agents.
- **Services provided both to businesses and to consumers** like legal or fiscal advice, real-estate services, construction (including architects), distributive trades, the organisation of trade fairs, car rental and travel agencies.
- **Consumer services** like tourism, leisure services, sports centres and amusement parks.

Services excluded are:

- **Non-economic services of general interest (SGIs);**
- Public and private **healthcare** and **social services**, but only if they concern social housing, childcare and family services;
- Industries already covered by sector-specific legislation, such as **financial services**, **electronic communications** and **transport** (including **port services**);
- **Audiovisual services;**
- **Gambling and lotteries**, and
- Professions and activities linked to the exercise of **public authority** (e.g. notaries) and **tax services**.

The Directive could lead to a massive increase of trafficking in human beings as there is no control of documents and certificates of employees.

Poverty Causes Migration

Despite the brutal measures and laws adopted by the EU-member states to prevent migrants and refugees from entering European territory, the number of migrants trying to enter the “Paradise of Europe” is increasing. In 2006, more than 10 000 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean², sometimes even under the eyes of Frontex³ personnel. More and more women and children try to enter European territory and if successful, are often sheltered under inhuman conditions.

Apart from deteriorating climate conditions and war-torn conflicts, hunger and poverty caused by Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) imposed on many countries by the EU prompt people to migrate. The governing directive for these FTAs is the trade-strategy “Global Europe: A Stronger Partnership to Deliver Market Access for European Exporters”, adopted in June 2007 by the EU-Council.⁴ Like other EU-strategies and trade agreements, the “Global Europe Strategy” aims to further increase market access for European companies, to liberalise all profitable economic sectors such as water, energy, health, education, to increase profits by privatising public goods and services and by using the cheapest labour, the lowest taxes and standards. One major goal of this strategy is the elimination of all non-tariff trade-barriers, among them labour and environmental standards, at reciprocal level.

Social movements need to demystify the alleged positive impact of trade, economic growth, employment and relate it to increasing poverty, the growing gap between poor and rich worldwide.

Impact of EU-Policies on Africa

According to a study entitled “The Economics of Failure – The Real Cost of ‘Free’ Trade for Poor Countries” published in June 2005 by the development-aid organisation Christian Aid, trade liberalisation has cost sub-Saharan Africa US\$ 272 billion over the past 20 years. Liberalisation had been the price sub-Saharan countries had to pay for aid, loans and debt relief. So altogether, two decades of liberalisation cost sub-Saharan Africa roughly what it has received in aid.

2 See: <http://www.ecre.org/files/ECRAN%20Weekly%20Update%2031st%20May.pdf>. ECRE is the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. It informs an interested public about the latest EU developments in the area of asylum and refugee protection.

3 “European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union”. The European Union agency for external border security is responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the national border guards and deportations of migrants. Frontex is headquartered in Warsaw, Poland.

4 Source: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st10/sa10542.en07.pdf>

“Effectively, this aid did no more than compensate African countries for the losses they sustained by meeting the conditions that were attached to the aid they received.”⁵

Trade is to be blamed for mounting transport which increases pollution of our air and water, pollution enhances illnesses and hence health costs which cannot be met by poor people. Pollution has an escalating negative effect on climate change which affects all of us. Our livelihood is increasingly at stake as a consequence of the rising of sea levels, droughts, hurricanes and earth slides.

Despite the alarmingly high rates of poverty in countries of the South partly caused by pushing them into FTAs, one of the most influential lobby-groups in the EU – *BusinessEurope*, formerly known as UNICE – calls for more trade liberalisation. Recently *BusinessEurope* published a paper, *Priorities for External Competitiveness 2010-2014 – Building on Global Europe*.⁶ One of the major goals stated there is further liberalisation of trade and access to public procurement! And this concerns us as well. Hence, European companies want unrestricted access to all public services which they want to be privatized.

“The EU’s agenda for bilateral free trade agreements must be continued and intensified. Agreements must comprehensively address the barriers faced by companies...Barriers to participation in international public procurement markets are significant for key European sectors such as energy, water treatment, health-care, construction and transport. The EU needs to address them through the WTO, free trade agreements, strategic dialogues, action in international organisations and a reflection on reciprocal market opening.”

The devastating impact of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), a sort of Free Trade Agreements between the EU and the 78 ACP-countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) are already noticeable. Women are among those most adversely affected by the EPAs and trade liberalisation as they mainly work in the agricultural sector, e.g. as poultry and vegetable farmers. They are not able to compete with highly subsidised cheap agricultural products from Europe and are thereby driven out of business.

One of the strongest critics of the EPAs is Aminata Traoré, the former Minister of Culture of Mali, who said that *“Europe sends us its chicken legs, its used cars, its out-of date medicine and its worn out shoes, and, because your leftovers are flooding our markets, our craftspeople and farmers are being put out of business. Now China is sending its products to Europe – and these are not leftovers, but clean, competitive goods. And what does Europe do? It talks about tariffs. So I say that Africa, too, has a right to protect itself. Europe cannot panic about China and, at the same time, call on Africa to open up its markets”*

5 Claire Melamed: A Christian Aid briefing paper: The Economics of Failure – The Real Cost of ‘Free’ Trade for Poor Countries. 2005 http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/economics_of_failure.pdf

6 <http://www.businessEurope.eu/Content/default.asp?pageid=568&doid=25752>

Genetically Modified Organisms – GMOs

Closely connected to free trade and open markets is the proliferation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The arguments for the alleged advantages of genetically-modified agricultural products are easy to refute. GM food is not cheaper; on the contrary, genetically modified maize is one third more expensive than conventional maize in the US. For some GM plants, the use of agricultural chemicals has to be increased because pests have become resistant. The yield is often not higher either. Researchers of the Office for Technology and Technology Assessment of the German Federal Parliament (TAB) concluded that a benefit of GMOs cannot be proven. The use of GMOs is therefore primarily about controlling the seed and food market; a former employee at Monsanto once disclosed: “Monsanto wants world domination over all food production”. Back in the 1970s Henry Kissinger had already declared, “Control oil and you control nations; control food and you control people.” It is very alarming that the EU-Commission has on March 2nd, 2010 given green light to the cultivation of genetically modified potato “Amflora” for being processed into industrial starch. Amflora’s starch by-products can also be used as feed.

The European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)⁷ comments as follows, *“To authorize the BASF8 AmFlora Potato in spite the opposition of the large majority of farmers and civil society in Europe ... is a clear attempt by the EU-Commission to force the agenda of genetech industries. The introduction of the BASF Potato will inevitably lead to contamination of other potato crops as well as potentially soil bacteria and other species – threatening Europe’s already disappearing Biodiversity. In this case, the presence of a gene resistant to antibiotics poses a real danger to public health. It is important to preserve medications avoiding the creation of resistant bacteria due to the spreading of the gene”*.⁹

About 70% of the world’s population still live from agriculture. Around 80% of the agriculture sector in the ‘developing’ countries is in the hands of women. With the introduction of GMOs their livelihood is severely threatened.

7 Network of different European farmers’ organisations. Struggling for other food and agricultural policies based on more legitimacy, fairness, solidarity and sustainability, which are necessary in Europe to ensure food security, food safety, public health, employment in rural areas and to tackle the issues of the global food crisis and climate change. (see <http://www.eurovia.org/spip.php?article12>)

8 Editor’s annotation: BASF (derives from former name “Badische Anilin- & Soda-Fabrik” – former part of IG Farben, among companies one of the biggest profiteers from and exploiters of concentration camp prisoners’ work.) is nowadays the world’s biggest chemical company with head office in Ludwigshafen/Rhein, Germany.

9 See http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=881:gm-potatoamflora-commission-defies-farmers-and-biodiversity&catid=22:biodiversity-and-genetic-resources&Itemid=37

Land Grabbing

Apart from the proliferation of GMOs, land grabbing is another big danger for the livelihood of millions of people. Many countries such as Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries, but also China, Japan and Libya as well as transnational corporations buy or lease land in the Global South for agricultural production. There is a global competition for fertile land which the rich countries want to control to feed their own population. The volume of the contracts negotiated since 2006 is being estimated at 20 million hectares, the investments required are around 30 billion dollar according to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington. There are no exact figures as the negotiations on “*land grabbing*” are mainly conducted behind closed doors in order to prevent that these dirty businesses are being discussed in public. The oil-rich gulf emirate Qatar leased 40,000 hectares in Kenya for the production of fruit and vegetables and promised to pay 2.3 billion dollar as compensation for the extension of a Kenyan harbour. When peasants learned about this deal heavy protest emerged. In 2008 the government of Madagascar was overthrown when a deal about the lease of one quarter of fertile land between the Southern Korean company Daewoo and the government was disclosed.

In the meantime land grabbing has reached such alarming dimensions that the FAO¹⁰ and NGOs denounce this as a new form of “Neo-colonialism”. In May 2009, UN-Special Rapporteur for Food, Olivier de Schutter, warned that land grabbing is one cause for increasing food prices. Once food is becoming short, big companies – such as Daewoo – and financial investors may yield high profits. On the other hand, land grabbing jeopardizes further food security in the Global South where food prices have already reached very high levels. Hence, poverty and hunger are increasing.

We need to demystify the myth that enhanced economic growth and trade as well as competitiveness create jobs. This is simply not true. “Competitiveness” is the code word for the neoliberal, patriarchal capitalist politics which we have to combat. The gap between poor and rich is widening and has reached alarming dimensions.

Mounting Xenophobia

As many people in Europe are frustrated with the current politics and the economic crisis they turn to right wing political parties. Xenophobia, racism and neo-Nazism are on the rise in all European countries. The Hungarian right-extremist party “Jobbik” has three representatives in the European Parliament and other parties of the extreme Right are equally represented. On March 4th, Geert Wilders of the Dutch extreme right-wing “Party for Freedom” won

¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

the communal vote in the Netherlands. A CNN-headline of March 6th read, “Wilders calls for a European ban of all Muslim immigrants to Europe!” Ethnic minorities such as the Roma population are the scapegoats for increasing unemployment and suffer severe discrimination and poverty.

According to studies, 30% of the students in Eastern European countries are far right and appear to share the Nazi beliefs and convictions.

Two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the former Soviet Block the impact of the restoration of capitalism in the “ex-communist” countries is quite clear. Far from bringing democracy or improved social conditions for all, the introduction of the market economy has plunged widespread frustration about the social crisis into nationalistic fantasies and racist hysteria. This tendency can be observed in all European countries. Social and civil rights are sacrificed in order to protect the rights of capital and the rights of the free market. This undermines democratic values and social systems as well as human rights. The EU serves the interests of business. But, what is good for business is increasingly harmful for the environment and for poor people, and in particular for women who are affected most by poverty and unemployment. The increase in productivity that enables companies to produce more with fewer workers, calls for a radical change in policies, reduction of working hours and a redistribution of work. But the EU-Commission and our neoliberal governments are just doing the opposite: extending working hours and raising retirement age.

Ultimately all EU-strategy papers and trade agreements have only got one goal: to further increase market-access for European companies, to liberalize all profitable economic sectors such as water, energy, health and education; to secure natural resources; to increase profits by privatizing public goods and services and by using the cheapest labour, the lowest taxes and standards; in other words to implement neoliberal and imperialist policy.

The Danger of Increased Militarization

The destruction of social systems goes along with increasing militarization within countries (sophisticated surveillance systems) but also with aggression directed towards other countries. Our police forces are equipped with the Taser, which is the most “suitable weapon to combat social riots and upheaval”, according to the producer. This militarization, which is justified by the alleged threat of terrorism, costs billions of dollars which would be needed for social services such as health care, education and so on. If we protest against unjust social systems we might be labelled as terrorists who want to destroy the capitalist system.

Stockholm Programme

In this context I want to draw your attention to another EU-programme which is most alarming. This is the “Stockholm Programme”¹¹ which was adopted by the European Council in December 2009. The Stockholm Programme will, for the period from 2010 to 2014, set the agenda for EU justice and home affairs and internal security policy. The Statement by the *European Civil Liberties Network* on the new EU five-year plan on Justice and Home Affairs, which was published in April 2009, reads as follows:

“The EU has been developing the so-called ‘Area of freedom, security and justice’ – law and policy on police cooperation, counter-terrorism, immigration, asylum and border controls – for more than a decade. It claims to have upheld civil liberties and balanced people’s privacy with its policies but many disagree, arguing that the EU has failed to uphold the human rights and democratic standards upon which the European Union claims to be founded.

The EU has gone much further than the USA in terms of the legislation it has adopted to place its citizens under surveillance.

What to expect from the next five years: an EU-ID card and population register, ‘remote’ (online) police searches of computer hard drives, Internet surveillance systems, satellite surveillance, automated exit-entry systems operated by machines, autonomous targeting systems, risk assessment and profiling systems... Expansion of the paramilitary European Gendarmerie Force, deployment of EU-Battle Groups, crisis management operations in Africa, permanent EU-military patrols in the Mediterranean and Atlantic.

We demand a change in the current political agenda towards protecting social, economic and human rights at the national and global level. The Stockholm agenda, and many more preceding Justice and Home Affairs policies on migration, terrorism, policing and security are in clear violation of democratic standards and human rights. We therefore demand a retraction of anti-terrorism legislation and restrictive migration laws, and the implementation of a truly democratic political and economic system.

We call on everyone to engage in the discussions on the Stockholm programme, to inform yourselves and others and make your views known, and to defend freedom and democracy against the surveillance society that the EU is becoming”.

11 For full background and ongoing documentation on the “Stockholm Programme” see: <http://www.statewatch.org/future-group.htm>

Conclusion

The prevailing capitalist and patriarchal system will further drive us into misery and possibly war. As Jean Jaurès, a French Socialist politician, once said, “Capitalism entails war, as the cloud entails rain”. This is the big danger in our world. A think tank in the US already openly discusses the possibility of a war between the US and China.

We need to form a new feminist peace movement to combat the devastating impact of increased new arms production, the rise in arms exports – Germany is now the third most important arms exporting nation (!) – which fuels armed conflicts and the proliferation of nuclear power plants and nuclear energy. We women have to fight for a new global world order which is free of patriarchal capitalism and the destructive concept of “growth” which is ecologically and socially a disaster. The 100th anniversary of the International Women’s Day calls for a feminist revolution!

Is 'State – Feminism' Transformative or, in Fact Counterproductive?

Summary of Speech by Drude Dahlerup

By Toni Liversage, writer and journalist, Denmark

In her presentation, Drude Dahlerup, professor at Stockholm University, asked the question of whether state feminism – when feminism is institutionalized – creates change or rather hinders it. And she started off by mentioning the speech of Clara Zetkin at the first congress of the 'Second International' in 1889, which in particular stressed how important it was to get women into the socialist movement – which would otherwise fail to change society – and this was something entirely new; previously, women had primarily been viewed as the Revolution rear guard.

Clara Zetkin also presented a class analysis, which stated that while there were contradictions between women and men in both the upper and middle classes, it was not the case for the working class.

This was indeed a theory that the Women's Movement in the 1970s certainly did not agree with. On the contrary it believed that women could have common interests across class barriers and at the same time despite class barriers they could be exposed to the same conditions such as violence against women.

But even though there had been a great progress since the time of Clara Zetkin, why did it then still take so long time to evolve?, Drude Dahlerup asked. She repeated the question, which was the theme of the presentation: When feminism is institutionalized – does it create change or, in fact, the opposite?

One of the examples she embarked upon was the problem of sexual harassment, originated in the patriarchal system, which historically gives men the right to women's bodies.

But does this mean that sexual harassment can only be eliminated when society has fundamentally changed? Or will the small steps through programmes and committees against sexual harassment, places where you can complain about sexual harassment, etc., lead to improvements here and now?

In reality, this is all about the old debate about reform or revolution.

Drude Dahlerup's conclusion was that "State Feminism" cannot fundamentally change the patriarchal system, but through external pressure from a broad Women's Movement and a strong public debate, there will nevertheless be an opportunity to create real and noticeable progress.

Human Trafficking – Women and Children as the Slaves of Today

Line Barfod

Last summer a woman knocked on the door of a farmer in the countryside in Denmark. The farmer let her into his house and she told him she had been held as a slave by his neighbour for several weeks. She had been beaten and raped several times. The farmer was shocked and called the police. He thought they would help the woman. The police came and started questioning her. When they found out that she was illegally in Denmark, they arrested her. That often happens in Denmark and also in many other countries.

Today there are more slaves in the world than in all the 350 years of transatlantic slave trade. It is terrible for all the women, men and children who are treated as commodities and not as human beings. But it is also a threat to democracy.

I have been working against human trafficking and modern slavery for several years now. And the problem grows bigger and bigger and organized crime finds new ways of exploiting people all the time. But awareness is also growing. And international cooperation against slavery is much more advanced today than it was only a few years ago.

Lately I have been very inspired by the book “Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery”, written by Siddharth Kara. It is the first time somebody tries to analyse the business of modern slavery. He also describes the underlying causes of slavery and he comes up with suggestions of how to stop slavery.

Slavery today has various purposes: forced prostitution of women and children, forced labour, begging, stealing and many others. Besides drug trafficking and arms trade, human trafficking is one of the world’s most profitable businesses.

Today the life of a human being is very cheap. When transatlantic slave trade was transporting thousands of slaves from Africa to America a slave was quite “expensive”, so the “owner” had an interest in keeping the slave alive. At that

time a slave sold into farm work in the USA cost an amount equalling 4,000 dollars today. But nowadays a slave for farm work is sold for just 300 dollars.

The rapid spread of neoliberal globalization after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of state socialism, have led to an increase of poverty worldwide. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forced many countries to cut down on social expenses and the public sector with the result of inequalities being increased.

In the former Soviet Union the total gross domestic product fell by 44 % from 1990 to 1998. In comparison: during the same period the increase of the GDP in the United Kingdom was 11 % and in USA 18 %. In 1998 the Ukrainian economy was only 41 % of the size it was in 1989. The population fell by 1.6 million with over 500.000 being trafficked.

Moldova suffered most. Its economy shrank to 35 % its size in 1990. And the population decreased by 16.5 %. More than one third of the individuals these numbers refer to were trafficked.

In 1990, 23 million East Europeans lived on less than 2 dollars a day. By 2001 the number had grown to 93 million, or one out of four in the region. Inflation was very high – 3,000 % in some former Soviet Republics, so most people lost all their savings.¹

This great poverty means that for many people there is no hope, no future. So they become very vulnerable to exploitation. Many become migrants by their “own choice”, namely forced by economic or political reasons, others are sold by their families.

In many countries women are considered to be of less value than men, they do not get an education and their only future is to be married. Gender inequality is still very high in spite of more than 100 years of struggle for equal rights.

And also many ethnic and religious groups are discriminated against. Women who are also members of a minority group that is discriminated against are more vulnerable to trafficking.

What can we do to stop modern slavery? We have to use different tools to stop modern slavery. And we have to erase both the underlying causes – primarily poverty and discrimination – and also the demand for bonded labour. There is a demand for buyable sex. And there is a demand for cheap workers for domestic work, farm work, work in hotels, restaurants and so on.

We have for many years been talking of a brain drain from the developing countries to the rich countries. Today we can also talk of a care drain, where

1 All data see Siddharth Kara: Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery, p. 27

women are leaving their own children at home to come to the rich countries to work as nannies. And many of them are exploited in a way that can only be called slavery.

To end poverty is a big task and as left wing parties we work in many ways towards changing the distribution of wealth in the world. But I do not think we have to wait until we have socialism in the whole world before we can stop slavery. I also think that the economic tools needed to stop slavery will help with our struggle for socialism.

Important tools are strong trade unions and women's organisations. People shall be empowered to organize themselves and find solutions together.

We also have to fight international treaties that undermine the right of fair working conditions and stop neo-colonial exploitation of people and resources by transnational companies. Many of the slaves today come from West Africa. If people used to make a living from fishing, now western fishing industries destroy their living basis.

Fighting the discrimination against women is about education, social security, health care and changing gender roles. And that is still a task in the whole world. We still have a long way to go before men and women are equal.

I think it is very important that we begin to focus a lot more on slavery and not just on slave trade, on trafficking. The big profit does not lie in slave trade but in exploitation, in slavery. And as long as the focus lies on trade, that is, on trafficking, it is mainly considered as an issue of immigration. If we start to look at it as slavery and focus on the exploitation, we have to look at the demand.

We must fight for the right of the victims to stay in the country of destination as long as they need and want to. Today a victim only has the right to stay for 30 days according to the convention of the European Council. In Denmark, if people cooperate with the authorities they can stay up to 100 days. But most of the victims disappear long before that. Also they are too frightened of what will happen to them and to their families and so they succumb to the traffickers' claims. So often they are trafficked again to earn some more money and send back a little part of the money to their families. Then their families will not be hurt by the traffickers.

So if we really want to help the victims we must find a way for them to legally earn money and a way to protect them and their families. And we also have to make sure they can return home with another story of what they have been doing. If people in the countries of their origin learn they have been in prostitution they will be isolated and stigmatized in society and often also by their families.

We also have to focus on police work. I think the left wing parties – at least in Denmark – have failed for many years to recognize the big threat of organized crime to a democratic society. We must demand that the police, the tax authorities, the authorities that control working conditions and other relevant authorities put much more effort into controlling and combating slavery. In Denmark there are officially 250 victims of sex trafficking. Instead of persecuting them, police should be looking for the victims, rescue them, find the traffickers, send them to prison and confiscate their property.

The risk of being discovered by the police is very small and the profit from exploiting slaves is so big, that there will be more and more slavery if we do not do a lot more to stop it.

According to Siddharth Kara's business analysis in a Western European city there is a profit of 74.000 dollars made from one slave each year. Compared to the costs for the slave owner, that is a profit of 65 %. You cannot earn that much in many other ways.

Fight against Human Trafficking in Denmark

In the Danish parliament we are several MPs from almost all parties that work together against trafficking. We ask a lot of questions, we call upon one or more ministers to come to a committee meeting in the parliament, and we have debates in parliament and put forward motions about new initiatives. We arrange a conference in parliament each year where we invite both the authorities and the NGOs and ask them to tell us about what is going on and where they think we need to strengthen the efforts or take new initiatives. This is a very important tool for us because we both get a lot of information and we keep trafficking in focus for the participants. It is also our goal to raise public awareness and pressure towards abolishing slavery.

The biggest trade union in Denmark mounted a great campaign against human trafficking a few years ago. Back then, an informal network was formed, where we meet about three times a year and in between we use email to inform each other of news on the subject. In the network we are MPs and members of the city council of Copenhagen from almost all parties, representatives from trade unions, women's organisations, NGOs, state authorities, journalists and artists. So we have almost the whole society represented except economy's stakeholders and we hope to get them engaged as well.

In the Nordic Council² we have been working against human trafficking and slavery for many years now. One of the results is that we got the ministers of social affairs to discuss the subject with their colleagues from the Baltic States and to coordinate their efforts. So, not only the ministers of justice and the police are now cooperating. And most important, it is those who work directly with the problems in the streets, in the shelters and so on that meet now and talk about their experiences and how they can cooperate. The Nordic Council additionally supports shelters and projects that empower girls in the Baltic States and in North-west Russia, so they are less vulnerable to traffickers.

We have also decided that we will only use hotels that guarantee that they do not cooperate with the prostitution business. And the Danish parliament has decided to do the same.

Denmark agreed upon an action plan against human trafficking in 2003 and a new one in 2007. We are going to have a third in 2011. One of the most important things in the second action plan was the establishing of a centre against human trafficking. There all the initiatives are coordinated and new knowledge is collected. Until now all efforts in Denmark have been against trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. But we are pretty sure that there is also human trafficking for labour and begging. The centre is doing research work and establishes a close cooperation with trade unions and other NGOs. As MPs we have a dialogue with the centre about its initiatives.

We have now got all the structures in place and the next step will be to secure permanent funding instead of short-time funding. And to make sure that all the persons that meet possible victims are educated in handling the situation. This concerns the police, social workers, immigration authorities, lawyers, judges and others. And the most challenging part is to change our views so that we stop looking at the victims as illegal immigrants and instead see them as victims who need help and support. And furthermore respect them as autonomous individuals and listen to them. And we are working with the idea of getting international companies, like the big hotel chains, to employ victims as trainees and then later give them a job, when they return to their own countries. So they have a future and they can come home with another story than having been a victim.

In our new working group in the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference we are discussing how we can have an analysis of the business in our countries like the one Siddharth Kara presented in his book. I think that could be done

2 The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers are intergovernmental forums for co-operation between the Nordic countries. The Nordic Council concentrates on inter-parliamentary cooperation. The Nordic Council of Ministers, founded in 1971, is responsible for inter-governmental cooperation.

in many countries and be of use both in the analysis of the problem and in the argumentation.

In Denmark there are negotiations on the labour market for new collective agreements. And for the first time the trade unions had adopted the demand of stopping social dumping. Social dumping is of course a lot more common than slavery, but if we can stop social dumping and control that the working conditions and the wages follow the collective agreement, we can also stop slavery. But until now the employers and the state authorities have not been very keen on doing anything. They leave it to the trade unions to find and stop exploitation.

In this field we also have a problem with the EU, where the court has decided in several cases that it is more important to have competition on wages and working conditions than to protect the workers and society against social dumping.

We have fair trade, but that is mostly for agrarian products. The Red-Green Alliance has been working for several years to implement a general stamp that shows that a product has been produced under fair working conditions. Such a stamp could be used on chocolate, fish, carpets, hotels and many other things. It is about time that sustainability is not just about environment but also about human beings.

A big part of the slaves are forced to prostitution. They are raped several times every day and are often beaten and threatened. I simply cannot understand how any man can buy sex from a woman who is obviously held as a slave. But we know that many men do that. And campaigns against it are not enough. All the four centre-left parties in opposition in Denmark now work for the criminalisation of woovers. It is already illegal to buy sex from a victim of human trafficking, which, according to Danish law, is rape.

But we have said very clearly that we also want a lot more social work to help all those who are in prostitution. This means both the victims of human trafficking and those who say they are in prostitution by their own free choice. What we can see in other countries is that when prostitution is legal there is also more of it and more exploitation and slavery.

To stop slavery is a very big task and it can only be done if we work together. Organized crime is working together across borders and we have to do the same. And I think it could be very useful if we discussed what socialist and feminist parties can do to stop slavery.

Women in Armed Conflict Areas

Gona Saed

In this text I will give an overview of the effects of armed conflict on women's lives in general and talk about some of the common experiences and forms of violence against women. I will then write about the experiences and struggles of women in Iraq and will give some real life examples of what happened to women especially since 2003, the "liberation".

In times of armed conflict women are facing the continuation and the intensification of all the forms of violence against women already existing in our different societies. We all know that physical and sexual violence are universal and can be found in all cultures, religions and backgrounds. I also think that this form of violence is purely based on our gender, which means: no matter if we are European, Kurdish, African, Asian or Muslims, Christians or Buddhists, much of the violence we are subjected to is due to the identity we share and that is being a WOMAN / FEMALE / GIRL.

"The violence towards women in conflict is largely based on traditional views of women as property, and often as sexual objects"¹. This is the basis of patriarchal views on women universally.

"Around the world, women have long been attributed the role of transmitters of culture and symbols of nation or community. Violence directed against women is often considered an attack against the values or 'honour' of a society and therefore a particularly powerful tool of war. Women therefore experience armed conflicts as sexual objects, as supposed symbols of national and ethnic identity, and as female members of ethnic, racial, religious, or national groups. Violence against women is not accidental. It is a weapon of war".

1 All quotes from Amnesty International Report Human Rights fact sheet "Rape as a Tool of War", see: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/stop-violence-against-women-svaw/rape-as-a-tool-of-war/page.do?id=1108239> and "Violence against Women in armed conflict", see: http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/stop-violence-against-women-svaw/violence-against-women-in-armed-conflict/page.do?id=1108213#fn_1

The most common forms of violence resulting from conflict or refugee situations are: rape, sexual assault associated with physical violence, sexual slavery, especially at the hands of soldiers, forced marriages, forced pregnancies and forced prostitution. Women are forced to offer sex for survival, or in exchange for shelter, food and protection.

Violence perpetuated by the family or community in times of conflict take the forms of: imprisonment of women for fear of attack, the deprivation of education and employment, honour killings as a consequence of rape, re-appearance of FGM within the community attacked and many more.

The statistics about women in conflict zones reveal the following: In Rwanda, up to half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide. The numbers were as high as 60,000 in the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Sierra Leone, the number of war-related sexual violence against women was as high as 64,000.

“The consequences for victims of sexual violence in war are grave and may affect women for the rest of their lives. These include serious and chronic medical problems, psychological damage, life-threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS, forced pregnancy, infertility, stigmatization and/or rejection by family members and communities”.

Many acts of sexual violence are tantamount to torture under traditional international law. These acts are considered war crimes and constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Convention.





Images 2&3 show Iraqi female students in 1963-1964, 26 years before the so-called "liberation" of Iraq in 2003

During the 1960s and 1970s, Iraqi women and girls enjoyed relatively more freedom and rights than many of their counterparts in the Middle East. The Iraqi Provisional Constitution of 1970 guaranteed many rights to women and their right to vote, to attend school, to run for political office, and to own properties were recognized in other laws in Iraq.

Meanwhile, Iraq has undergone three decades of WAR:

1980s: the Iran-Iraq War

1991: the First Gulf War

The UN-Economic Sanctions lasting for 13 years (1990-2003)

2003: the Iraq War / the Second Gulf War

With the growing militarization of Iraq, the then Iraqi government gave its policy towards a more religious and reactionary direction. Although during the 1980s' war with Iran, women were encouraged by the state to go to work as men were needed to go to battle fields, they suffered greatly as they had to work for long hours and still live up to the very traditional role of taking care of their families.

One significant effect of this war on women was the increase of prostitution and forced prostitution, especially on widows who had their husbands killed in the war, to service the army generals and high ranks.

During the 1990s and after the First Gulf War, the situation started to change for women in particular, since Iraqi society rapidly deteriorated due to a combination of legal, economic and political factors.

First of all, women and girls were hugely affected by the UN-sanctions, as they were denied access to food, health care, and education.

Many children – especially girls – were taken out of schools because of their family's poverty and lack of financial means.

These effects were complicated even more by changes in the law that restricted women's mobility and access to employment in an effort to ensure that jobs were given back to men; for example, in 1998, the government dismissed all females working as secretaries in governmental agencies. In June 2000, a new law was adopted which required ministers to put restrictions on women working outside the home and on women's freedom to travel abroad; high schools were required by law to provide single-sex-education only. By these steps backward, the government also aimed at gaining the support of religious and tribal groups with the consequence that there was a reversion to religious and tribal traditions on a large scale.

With the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the violation of women's human rights reached its peak. Women in Iraq faced a campaign of terrorism.

Due to chaotic circumstances and a lack of security, women were attacked and terrorised by small gangsters and armed men in the streets for not wearing headscarves or for wearing makeup or being out late in the evenings. By and by, these sporadic attacks developed into an organised, planned and eventually institutionalized terrorism aiming at ending all female participation in social and political life.

Since 2003, women suffered rape, torture, kidnapping, and killings at the hands of occupation forces but also many sectarian and fundamental religious groups. Instances of domestic violence, 'honour killings', compulsory veiling, FGM and forced marriages at the hands of immediate or distant family members increased dramatically.

The cities became the field of action for a special Islamic army called "Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice – PVPV". Such armies formally exist in many countries with their job being to guard the streets and public spaces and watch out for any breach of the Islamic rules and codes. In only a few years, the power and influence of these groups has increased so that many of their former members are now holding the positions of government officials and can also be found in other institutions.

Women were threatened for wearing Western-style clothes; they were often forced to quit their jobs and retreat to their homes, sometimes for years.

Some examples of above acts against women are the following: In Basra in 2005, dozens of armed men attacked college students enjoying a spring picnic. The students' crimes consisted in socialising and in playing secular music. One of the Sheiks (community leaders) publicly said after the incident, "We beat them because we are authorized [by God] to do so, and that is our duty."

"We warn against not wearing a headscarf and wearing makeup. Those who do not abide by this will be punished. God is our witness, we have notified you." This was a slogan written outside the main downtown market in the city of Basra, Iraq.

According to a study by the Basra Security Committee, 133 women were killed in Basra in 2007; of these 79 were deemed to have "violated Islamic teachings" and 47 were murdered in so-called "honour killings".

Officially released data report that as many as 650 Iraqi women were killed within the first two months of 2008. "Politically active women, those who did not follow a strict dress code, and women [who were] human rights defenders were increasingly at risk of abuses, including by armed groups and religious extremists"²

The top of the female death list was occupied by PhD holders, professionals, activists and regular office workers. Some of the reasons for women getting killed were not wearing a veil or headscarf or working with foreign companies; the list of casualties is long and by no means complete. It includes female doctors helping women in need of an abortion, academics and lecturers, election candidates, female parliament members, women working in beauty saloons, translators in contact with foreigners, female affiliates to opponent parties, women working with civil society and human rights organizations, journalists and many more.

There is trafficking of hundreds of Iraqi women into prostitution and sexual slavery. A Baghdad Women's Organization estimates that at least 200 Iraqi women are sold into slavery every year; although US-based Human Rights Watch claims that in reality the numbers are in the thousands.

Temporary marriages in return for money are widespread in Iraq. The term refers to a type of prostitution with the addition of the blessings by a cleric and acceptance by the dominant religion. Women, especially widows, only enter this kind of marriage because they lack support for their kids and families. The

² According to a report by Amnesty International in 2007

marriage lasts for one day, one week or any period of time; women are paid different “prices” for entering these marriage arrangements. Usually temporary marriages are organized by religious militia groups that sign the women up for marriages of this kind.

In many countries a raped woman can receive support, health treatment and therapy. In conflict-ridden Iraq, she gets killed – if not by the perpetrator – by her own family for bringing shame on what is called their “honour”.

Very often violence – especially if it is sexual – is not reported because women would face grave consequences such as getting divorced, being abandoned by their families or even getting killed for having brought shame on their families.

Another shocking practice is that a woman who gets arrested or kidnapped for money will not be redeemed by her family, which would be done for male members. The background to this is that doing so would automatically bring shame to the family regardless of her innocence.

A century-old practice to settle conflicts between two tribes is to use women. Young girls are given away from one family to another in return for sparing the life of a male member, or to prevent bloodshed between the two families. Those women are the most vulnerable because they will be treated like house slaves, with most of them being given as second, third or fourth wife to men who are much older than them. This is now a very common practice in Iraq with the law being suspended and civil protection and a secular state missing.

The first attack on women’s rights was launched in January 2004, when the newly appointed Governing Council issued Law 137, which announced changing civil laws into Islamic laws for the period of preparation of the new constitution; yet, the law had to be revoked by the end of the same month.

The Islamic groups tried to change 8 March into another holiday to celebrate the birth of Islamic female Fatima Alzahra, 14 centuries ago.

In 2009, in some cities of Iraq, a newly-issued decree stated that female members of the city council should be accompanied by a male member of their family who is a “mahram” – which means a father, brother or other male relative – as body guard for them. According to the religious rules women cannot be outdoors or in the same space with men without the protection by a mahram.

In the beginning of 2010, a new decree was issued by the minister of education which says that boys and girls should be segregated in all schools.



A poster as part of an election campaign in 2010 for a woman candidate who had to put her husband's photo in the poster instead of her own photo.



One of the images of a female candidate in the 2010 Iraqi Parliamentary Elections.

I think you would agree with me that these photos need no further explanation in terms of what happened to women, how women's participation in the process of the so-called democratisation in Iraq is controlled and is hijacked in every way possible. It is not an informed and empowered participation of women in democracy but women being used in the process to fulfil the 25 percent-quota required by the constitution for women candidates.

Hope and Struggle

Women in Iraq are fighting, are resisting this institutionalized attack on their rights and freedom, the same as everywhere in the world, with the only difference being that they face greater barriers and much bigger enemies.

The demands of women in Iraq amount to no less than total equality with men, freedom and liberty, to being treated as human beings with the right of choice and control over their own lives who can contribute fully to society. Women in Iraq are calling for the sectarian personal status codes to be replaced by laws of equality, a secular constitution, full civil and citizenship rights for women, and an end to all forms of humiliation and violence against women.

Women are organized in various organizations and institutions, they are raising their voices in and outside Iraq against all the violations of their rights, against discrimination, for full equality and the abolition of all discriminatory laws against women. The women's movement has organized many strong demonstrations, seminars and campaigns against the occupation and for a secular, democratic Iraq that guarantee women all their rights as citizens equal to men. The women's movement is also a big part of a greater secular movement in Iraq that strives for socialism, equality and human rights.

The Workers' Communist Party of Iraq, the Workers' Communist Party of Kurdistan, the Iraqi Freedom Congress and many workers unions and associations are all part of a secular movement, they are also the only political parties that are truly defending equality for women in Iraq and support women in their struggle every day.

And finally, the women's movement in Iraq needs the support and solidarity from people like you to keep up the struggle and have hope.

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