

# ***In the Fight for a United Struggle Against All Trump’s Attacks –***

# **For a Movement that Champions the Cause**

# **of Working-Class & Oppressed Women!**

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## ***A Revolutionary Socialist Perspective***

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The oppression of women has been the one constant feature of the long and terrible history of human society’s division between ruling classes and the laboring classes they have exploited and oppressed. From the first class societies, through the age of slave empires, to modern capitalism, the subordination of women has always served the interests of the ruling classes. Sexism has helped keep the exploited masses divided and conquered too, with the relatively privileged position of men among the exploited classes exercising a corrupting influence on their consciousness, encouraging them to embrace oppressive practices rather than fight for a world of justice for all.

The rise of capitalism, however, with its illusions of individual freedom, encouraged women to demand their rights and generations of struggle have won great victories. Especially in countries like the U.S. whose great wealth (sustained by the super-exploitation of the “Global South” of colonies and former-colonies) has allowed their rulers the luxury of conceding democratic rights and other improvements in order to placate the demands of angry social movements at home. Thus the right to vote and other formal recognitions of legal equality, as well as limited rights to reproductive choice, have all been won through hard fought struggles.

But now, as the world capitalist economy lurches toward another Great Depression (only narrowly and temporarily averted in 2008 by the Federal government’s \$12 trillion bailout of Wall Street), the world’s ruling capitalist classes are waging an escalating war on working-class and oppressed people’s rights and living standards in order to save themselves from bankruptcy. Women’s rights and bodies are on the front line of this attack, and nowhere is this more clear than in the rise to power in Washington of the vile, woman-hating authoritarian Donald Trump.

With a lifetime of sexism behind him, from his promotion of “beauty pageants” to allegations by ex-wives and others against him of rape and other violent attacks and harassment, Trump’s campaign launched outrageous attacks on women for their appearance and sexuality. Infamously, he even dismissed as insignificant “locker room talk” his caught-on-tape bragging of sexually assaulting women by “grab[bing] them by the pussy.” He promised that as president that he will appoint Supreme Court justices who

will overturn the constitutional protection of women’s right to terminate a pregnancy if they choose, and he has already begun these attacks.

Three days after taking office, Trump reinstated a “gag rule” blocking all U.S. aid to non-profit organizations around the world if their activities include reference to women’s right to terminate a pregnancy if they wish, let alone the provision of abortions. Trump has declared his support for Republican plans to end all funding of Planned Parenthood (PP), which goes along with their repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) at home. In both cases its impact will not only be the eradication of abortion rights but also access to contraceptives. In fact many women will lose their only source of general healthcare as well, which at present may be what they get through PP or other non-profits. And Trump has continued his campaign’s aggressive heterosexism, starting with rescinding previously established federal guidelines recognizing the right of transgender students to use public school restrooms that correspond to their gender identity.

Trump has inspired Republicans at the state level to pursue even more aggressively anti-woman and anti-LGBT measures. In Texas, for example, some Republicans are promoting a bill that would allow doctors to lie to a woman throughout her pregnancy about the state of her health as well as the fetus, notably in cases where knowledge of specific health risks for the mother or fetus might encourage a woman to consider abortion. Other bills are being promoted that compel school teachers to notify parents if their children are perceived to be gay and lesbian, and that would deny transgender people the right to use appropriate public bathrooms.

### **Trump, Race, and the Working Class**

Trump’s outrageous sexism in particular has triggered the long-overdue revival of a women’s movement in this country. But the focus of Trump’s reactionary campaign for the presidency was, however, his efforts to revive racism. He launched his campaign with his attacks on undocumented immigrants as likely “rapists and drug dealers” and went on to denounce all Muslims as would-be terrorists. And Trump has continued this focus with his first major acts as president. He has sought to implement travel bans on people from predominantly-Muslim countries and encouraged a wave of

harassment and detentions of Muslims by immigration officers. He has unleashed immigration police to apprehend and deport undocumented immigrants wherever they can be found, and announced the creation of a new government office to publicize crimes allegedly committed by undocumented immigrants. Meanwhile, Trump has turned a blind eye to the wave of violence against people of color that his racism has inspired, including three separate shootings of Indian people in the last two weeks.

Further, while Trump avoids openly targeting Black Americans specifically with his racist vitriol for fear of provoking mass struggles, his administration is a clear threat to their rights and lives. His appointment of the notoriously racist Senator from Alabama, Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III, to be Attorney General signals his commitment to end many of the federal government's limited protections of Black people's rights. Knowing that racist voter suppression by Republican state governments was essential to his narrow victory in the presidential election, Trump has continued to promote myths of widespread voter fraud in order to prepare for even greater attacks on Blacks' and Latinos' right to vote. And Trump continues to refer to Black neighborhoods as nothing but war zones to justify supporting police departments acting like occupying armies there.

Trump's racism aims to overturn one of the most important achievements of generations of Black people's struggles in this country: the hard-won recognition by most working-class whites that Blacks are people like them, despite the ruling class's efforts throughout this country's history to keep the working class divided by racism. The respect that Black people have won in the course of their heroic struggles for their rights is so important because a united, interracial struggle of the working class is the key to finally putting an end to the horrors of racism by overthrowing the capitalist system that created it and that promises the working class of this country and the world nothing but worsening poverty, oppression and war.

Decades of declining living standards for the whole working class in this country have already eroded popular support for the capitalist system and its political parties and encouraged the increasing popularity of socialist ideas. There has been growing fear in the ruling class that the next crisis could see an uprising of working-class struggle that could threaten their rule. Trump aims to save the ruling class from this threat by re-opening the division of the working class. He recognizes that the mainstream media's portrayal of his election victory as the result of white working-class support is largely a myth – the swing of white working-class voters from the Democrats was relatively small compared to the much larger numbers who, like many Blacks and Latinos, chose not to vote because of the Democrats' years of betrayals of their interests.

In this context, Trump aims to recruit white working-class people to racism by promising them that if they support his authoritarian rule, he will make sure they are rewarded with the return of prosperity. In reality, Trump intends his racism, along with his sexism, to win support for devastating attacks on this country's unions, leaving the working class more divided and defenseless than ever before in the face of a collapse into another Great Depression.

## **Beware the Democratic Party Trap**

It is obvious to most people that compared to Trump a Democratic president would have been a lesser evil. No one should hold any illusion, however, that the Democrats will be a reliable ally in the struggle against Trump.

The Democrats have sought a cooperative relationship with the Republicans and now even with Trump. That is because their primary loyalty is to the capitalist class, not to the working-class and Black and Latino people who make up the bulk of their voting base. Their long record of betraying their working-class supporters cost them the presidency: Obama's Wall Street bailout plus his abandonment of the working class to the ravages of the Great Recession; his minimal efforts to create jobs and his enthusiasm for trade deals that heavily favored capital over labor; his record-breaking deportations of undocumented immigrants and his refusal to offer any serious reforms to address the crisis of racist police terror and mass incarceration, even when confronted by the rise of the Black Lives Matter protests. Hillary Clinton's insistence that "America is already great" proved to millions that she and the Democrats were not concerned about the terrible conditions so many people face.

Since Trump's inauguration the Democrats have already proved to be a useless opposition, as have their allies who run the country's unions and civil rights organizations. They could not unite against most of his worst and most dangerous appointments, the union leaders treacherously accommodated to Trump's empty promises of jobs, and above all they all constantly promote a strategy of diverting all mass struggles into the voting booths of 2018 and 2020. Many Democratic voters have expressed shock at the lack of a fightback, especially since Trump is doing exactly or even worse than what they had claimed to oppose during the campaign.

## **Is Today's Call for a Women's Strike the Way Forward?**

A range of organizations are involved in protests and other activities around International Women's Day. The most important call is for a "Women's Strike." This approach is intended to move forward from the "Women's March" of January 21. But the "strike" call does not relate to the traditional practice of collective action by workers, whether it be women workers or all workers.

Strikes usually aim to cut off profits and production of employers, often just to improve wages or conditions of employment. And a more powerful general strike could force political concessions from the government. This is exactly the kind of united action the workers and oppressed need to take on Trump, but the working class is far from having the awareness and unity to contemplate such a massive action today. Further, any serious strike, especially a general strike, would have to rally the support and active involvement of the unemployed, youth, and middle-class layers of society who identify with the demands.

Working-class revolutionaries must popularize the idea of big protests strikes among our fellow workers. We favor making demands on all the unions and organizations of the oppressed that they mobilize their members and all their resources to begin to wage a united fightback. Gathering thousands of militant women across the country would have been a great opportunity to place such demands on the current misleaderships.

The “Women’s Strike” advocates do not focus on the central need for a working-class led women’s movement, and the centrality of the alliance of the working class and oppressed. Nor do they point out the overall need for socialism as the answer to capitalist imperialism. Yet that is all what is on the agenda.

### **The Trap of Sectoralism**

The calls for women’s strikes in the U.S. also miss the huge contrast between the conditions and aims of recent women’s strikes elsewhere and those at home. One example often cited as an inspiring model was the women’s strike in Poland last year. The Polish government was proposing an absolute ban on abortions. Among other outrages, it would have made rape victims who got abortions face worse punishment than the rapists. The mass women’s strike there focused on one extreme

attack – and it did succeed in halting that cruel extension of Poland’s still-stringent anti-abortion law.

In general, it makes no sense to try to defend women’s rights in isolation from other struggles. After all, women are over half of the working class. And over half of Black people, and a substantial proportion of all immigrants, are women. All these oppressed groups are predominantly working-class in character. Also, a narrow strike strategy that excludes women and others who are not working cannot win in today’s conditions. Any important strike today will be confronted with major opposition from the government. It is impossible to contemplate fighting for big political changes without the unity of all the sectors under attack. The organizers of the “Women’s Strike” evade this overwhelming reality.

Movements that have been conducted on a sectoral basis only have typically ended up dominated by middle-class if

## ***The Socialist Origins & History of International Women’s Day***

International Women’s Day originated with the great strike of women garment workers in New York City in 1908 and the decision of the United States’ Socialist Party the following year to hold a yearly event on March 8 honoring the strike and focusing on the needs and struggles of working-class women. The following year an annual International Working Women’s Day was proclaimed by the International Women’s Conference of the Socialist International, the federation of the world’s socialist and labor parties. It has been observed around the world ever since, though liberals have sought to bury the day’s origins in working-class struggle and socialism.

Less than ten years later, on March 8, 1917 – exactly 100 years ago – in St. Petersburg, the capital of Tsarist Russia, working-class women protesting the barbarism and deprivations of the first imperialist “Great War,” World War I, marched from the bread ration lines to the factories, calling on workers to come out and demand that the government end the war. Within a day, most workers had left work in a general strike and were joined by soldiers who were in a state of mutiny. This was the start of the February Revolution (the Russian calendar was then several days behind the West’s) which overthrew Tsarism.

Two rival forms of government vied for power in the aftermath of the Tsar’s overthrow. One was a parliamentary-style provisional government dominated by liberals who relied on the support of the country’s capitalist class. The other consisted of councils (“soviets”) of democratically elected representatives of the workers, peasants, and soldiers that had been created in the course of the revolution to organize the struggle. During the revolution they had begun to take over functions of government when the old ruling powers became paralyzed, but were then persuaded to accept the rule of the professional politicians.

However the provisional government was doomed to fail as it continued Russia’s disastrous fighting in the war with the hope of seizing new territories and wealth, and it opposed the poor peasantry’s demands for land redistribution, two policies demanded by the country’s capitalists. The mass struggle culminated later that year in the workers’ socialist revolution led by the Bolshevik Party, which argued that for the masses’ to win their demands, the provisional government would have to be overthrown and all political power transferred to the soviets, with their Bolshevik majority committed to building a workers’ state with the support of the peasantry and spreading revolutions against capitalism around the world.

Women had sparked the revolution and they won significant gains through it, including the right to free abortion, quick civil divorce on request, access to education and the professions, equal pay for equal work, and the beginning of free socialized childcare. As well, the workers’ state ended all legal discrimination against gay and lesbian people. But the revolution in Russia, an imperialist but backward country, failed to spread as its leaders had hoped. Strangled by the imperialist powers and betrayed by the leaders of the reformist pro-capitalist Socialist Parties in Western Europe, the Soviet workers’ state remained isolated and beleaguered on all fronts and was eventually defeated by an internal counterrevolution led by Joseph Stalin.

As capitalism lurches toward another Great Depression and produces terrifying new rulers like Trump, however, this International Women’s Day and centennial of the beginning of the Russia revolution is a vital reminder of the leading role of women have played in revolutions, and how the overthrow of capitalism and building of socialism remains humanity’s only hope to escape the nightmare of capitalist barbarism. ★

not outright bourgeois leaders and so easily became subordinated to the Democratic Party and its purely electoral strategy. The women's movement of the late 60's and early 70's was a case in point: women were told to fight primarily for legalized abortion; but a few years after *Roe v. Wade* was handed down, Republicans pushed through the Hyde Amendment, which curtailed abortion access for poor women by excluding abortion funding under Medicaid. That measure disproportionately affected Black and other poor and working-class women. Combatting the Hyde Amendment was not a priority for the Democrats and establishment organizations like Planned Parenthood. Democrats year after year have quietly voted to renew the Hyde Amendment. The first time a Democratic politician included the repeal of the Hyde Amendment in a platform was Hillary Clinton in 2016, in her desperate bid to hold on to Black female support.

That's what happened to a women's movement not centred on the overall interests of the working class and oppressed. We believe that working-class leadership could attract layers of middle-class people as well, but it can only do so by winning them *away* from their attachment to capitalist politicians, which derives from their greater sense that they have a stake in the capitalist system. Middle-class layers face different material conditions in capitalist society; it is only the working class, especially the most oppressed working-class people, who are situated to be more in touch with the essential exploitative and oppressive essence of the system.

### **Women's Liberation Demands an End to Capitalism**

Marxists have shown that throughout the history of class society, women have been restricted by oppressive divisions of labor, changing according to the mode of production. With a great expansion of the productive forces, modern capitalism seems to promise the potential of ending women's subjugation; instead, it has maintained and deepened both the exploitation and oppression of most women of the world. At the same time, the gains from struggles for equal rights and equal opportunity benefited the women of the imperialist nations more than those in oppressed nations, and the women of the upper middle class and the capitalist class dramatically more than anyone else.

Revolutionaries argue that fighting off Trump's agenda to destroy the hard-won gains that women achieved over decades is necessary but not enough. Striving for equality under capitalism is an impossible goal, because women's subordination is key aspect enabling capitalism to survive. It is no accident that women find themselves today, in the most powerful and one of the richest countries in the world, fighting off Trump's agenda to destroy material and social gains achieved decades ago. These actually began being eroded well before Trump, because the capitalist system cannot sustain an end to gender discrimination.

Under the capitalist system, woman's unpaid work in tending to the family and home persists in being considered her primary job. This allows capitalism to get off cheaply in two ways. First, forcing working-class and poor women to tend to their family at home for free means women play the major role in the daily regeneration of themselves and their husbands as exploited workers – as well as producing and raising the next generation of workers for the capitalists. The cost of social services that would have to otherwise be paid by the capitalists

or their state to ensure a stable supply of healthy workers is greatly lessened. Most women these days shoulder the double responsibility of keeping the family intact and working outside the home. Second, the idea that woman's main job is in the home bolsters the tradition of paying women less than men.

On top of these direct economic gains for the capitalists, the subordination of women is a key social divide-and-conquer method all over the world. Likewise, capitalism's need for promulgating sexism based on the "family values" myth also drives attacks on LGBT people.

That's why women remain discriminated against and oppressed under capitalism. Marxists understand that the fundamental interests of ruling-class and working-class women are irreconcilable; the parasitic ruling class thrives by exploiting and oppressing the working class, whereas the liberation of working-class and poor women, as well as most middle-class women, can only come through doing away with the capitalist system and its reactionary division of labor and culture.

### **Mass Struggle Is the Road – Socialist Revolution Is the Only Solution**

Revolutionary socialists support all protests against Trump's attacks and we look for all opportunities to encourage bigger and more powerful mobilizations. We join in celebrating any partial success, such as the overturn of the initial Muslim Ban. In general, we favor placing demands on the unions, the big civil and immigrant rights organizations and other community groupings, calling on them to devote every effort to building a mass movement that vastly increases the participation of working-class and oppressed people. We want the masses to begin to develop a sense of their potential power, preparing the way for the type of massive struggles needed to have any hope of defeating Trump's attacks. And over time, we point out, such struggles can grow to challenge the capitalist rule altogether.

In our view, to put an end to the miseries of life under imperialist capitalism, the struggles of the working class and oppressed at home and around the world will have to culminate in socialist revolutions that overthrow capitalist rule. History has shown that revolutions inevitably inspire similar risings elsewhere; that is all the more likely in today's interconnected world. Only when the wealth and productive potential of the world economy is under the control of the working class will there be planned production of the goods and services the masses need. Then we can begin to build a new cooperative international society free of class exploitation and oppression – a socialist society of freedom and abundance for all. The need to overthrow imperialist capitalism demands the building of an international working class revolutionary socialist party, an instrument to lead revolutions by the working and oppressed masses. ★

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