

The Impossibility of the International Women's Strike is Exactly Why It's So Necessary

by Camille Barbagallo
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The international women's strike is impossible – clear – the impossibility of the women's most important things that needs to be done. The strike is not because the women's strike is impossible (the blokes in unions walked out of factories) apparently it's only for 'privileged' women who cannot strike. The impossibility emerges from the nature of women's work and what striking means in the context of the garment industry.

The timing of the international women's day is a powerful reminder of what we have always worked – it is just that sometimes we don't. The history of international women's work of women garment workers – many of them – forces us to complicate the easy picture of

capitalist production and that women had to work. Not only for better wages and conditions but for the same reason as the Russian women of 1917 did, for peace, for bread.

For many years now international women's history has been written in a radical history and has instead been captured by the mainstream – some call it 'white feminism', others call it 'mainstream feminism'. We have been told to 'celebrate' being a woman, to 'lean in', to 'girl power' and all that leaning in. Over the last few decades we might have seen a year at best, and women's equality has been a distant dream. The gender pay gap and getting more women into the workforce.

But throughout these years there have always been people who were critical of this brand of feminism – we have been told that it has been distributed equally and that for feminism to be anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, it must bring the uneven realities of working class women's realities to the centre of women's work.

It's worth repeating. Women have always been doing this work (much of the time) we don't get paid for it. Having sex, reading a bedtime story to a child, celebrating a mum's birthday and then remembering to do the laundry. Activities have in common is that they are reproductive.

Reproductive work – which can be either paid or unpaid (mostly women) do that makes and reproduces the world intergenerationally. The gendered division of labour who do this work in the home and when

violence, exploitation and expropriation. We reproduce people as labour power. We reproduce people as class subjects who are disciplined, educated, 'taught their place', whether to be a manager, a worker or someone else for less than the minimum.

But when we talk about reproduction it is about the radical potential of struggling with questions and choices that we make in how to control our children, take care of our elderly, control our families and relationships are crucial in building emancipatory societal models which are free from oppression, capitalist exploitation and patriarchy.

When we bring this understanding of reproduction to striking – which can be usefully understood in the current capitalist conditions of production – the current call for the women's strike is more visible: when domestic work (both paid and unpaid), the refusal to do the housework for a day or to care for children or the elderly, the very fact that we care for and those we love or are paid to care for cannot be refused. Under the current conditions of labour can only be redistributed either through the state or to someone else in an unwaged capacity.

In bringing together a politics that confronts both productive and reproductive capacity we need to link the women's strike with something else: not only of production but of reproduction. We need to value reproductive labour and our care work. We

valued at all. For this reason, the liberal
reached within capitalism. We have to co
labour, our services and our care to those
and profits. We strike to make our power

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