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ON MARCH 8TH: INTERNATIONAL WORKING WOMEN'S DAY

The Real Meaning of March 8th

Most workers in the world don't know the date of March 8th is of the greatest importance for them. And many of those who do know it don't realize what the date really represented in history. For us, conscious workers, for whom the struggle is our daily life, it is absolutely necessary we know our true history, the various battles waged by our class and the lessons we should draw from them.

First of all, since many workers in Haiti and throughout the world, especially in the maquilas and free trade zones, work in the textile industry, we should know that the mobilizations held on March 8th, 1908, were carried out precisely by textile industry workers. Despite this, presently, most workers in this branch know nothing of this part of our history.

In 1975, the United Nations proclaimed March 8th "International Women's Day". Once more, this was a recuperation of the international ruling classes to distort the real significance of our battles. In this way, they have attempted to wipe out the collective memory of the real working-class mobilization that occurred on this date, turning it into a wide-ranging, limited celebration completely void of class content, in which all women partake, including totally anti-worker and reactionary bourgeois women. In this way, the nature and logic of our battles are obliterated. Our own history is robbed from us.

What was March 8th?

March 8th is a historic date! Doubly so. First of all, on March 8th, 1857, a large number of factory workers in the United States took to the streets to demand their economic and political rights. The owners called the police who arrived immediately and opened fire, engaging in blind repression... Later on, in 1908, the same date of March 8th was once again a memorable date of struggle. On this day, capitalist bosses in Chicago set fire to a textile factory where over a thousand women worked. A very large number was terribly burnt. 120 died! This heinous crime happened simply because the workers were demanding that the legal 8-hour work day be respected, as well as substantial ameliorations of their work conditions since they were working in a hellish environment in which their very dignity was constantly and totally denied. In this factory, however, the workers refused to cower. They fought daily. And having reached a certain level of organization, they held protests, work stoppages and strikes... On this day of March 8th, 1908, instead of obeying the law and satisfying the workers' legal and legitimate demands, the factory owners decided to bar in this way what they called "the rising disorder".

Solidarity Mobilization and the “Commemoration”

An enormous national and worldwide solidarity campaign was launched, denouncing the workers' situation. Work stoppages, strikes and even factory occupations were held throughout the world to protest against this practice that revealed so crudely how capitalism has no consideration for human life when its economic interests are on the line. The campaign didn't succeed in really dealing with the capitalists responsible for this organized crime that happened on March 8th. But combatants in the entire world registered this date as highly significant of this factory's working women's immense courage; and, for all, this eternal flame glows in our hearts.

Several years later, in Germany, Clara Zetkin, a great combatant and revolutionary, suggested setting this precise date of March 8th as international day of the WORKING WOMAN, given its double significance for working-class struggles.

But, with the ebb of our class' struggles during the second part of the 20th century, March 8th began to lose its true meaning and, progressively, mainly due to petty-bourgeois deviationists, it was changed into “women's day”, in which much talk goes on concerning feminism and where, instead of consolidating working-class unity by calling men and women workers together in the struggle – just as, precisely, occurred during these historical March 8ths –, we're called to fight one another. The field thus prepared, in 1975, the UN easily resumed March 8th as “International Women's Day”.

To Understand and Draw Lessons

It's important to point out that one of the reasons for this deviation is the partial abandonment of working-class memory by members of this very class and, at the same time, the taking in hand of such an important theme as that of women by agents of other classes. Indeed, the specific theme of women, concerning the contradictions that may exist – and do exist – in the relations between men and women of the working-class, is of great importance. But it should always be resolved within our own class. First, because there exist here specificities that are totally our own; secondly, because once regrouped, only within our class can we find a true and complete solidarity. Finally, and above all, because we can't and shouldn't, under any conditions, consent to class collaboration under any circumstances, since these options will always lead us to lose our own independence, which is the most important for our class' emancipation, a key element for that of the entire humanity.

It is no coincidence that our struggles, of the working-class, gave rise to the date of March 8th. All battles for the peoples' emancipation, for the emancipation of humanity, emerge from the class interests of the working-class. This is also true of the struggle for women's rights. The working-class' liberation, in its true, wider, sense, will have to be a total liberation. Otherwise, it won't exist. The emancipation of the working-class is the only one that demands, indeed commands, concurrently, the emancipation of women.

Since this theme affects them too, many middle-class and even liberal bourgeois women have engaged in gender struggles and, deliberately – since they have several objectives and never forget what's most important – combine all women as having the same nature, mystifying us and, especially, taking the lead of initiatives. They completely detach March 8th from its first and basic meaning as a class battle where working-class women headed the struggles with hope and courage. They obscure all but gender considerations, thus twisting this date so profoundly belonging to us, when in practice, precisely the practice of struggle, we, men and women, had united together.

At present, during March 8th celebrations, women denounce the abuses they endure in patriarchal society. These problems are real and these denunciations have great importance. We can say that they contribute to the resolving of real, significant, human problems that we, as women workers and women of the peoples' camp suffer in our flesh as well. But never, either, will we forget that during this March 8th we faced the bosses – and their women! As always. We bear in mind the exploitation that we, women workers, suffer in the factory-prisons, the humiliations owners and managers submit us to on a daily basis, the constant and casual sexual harassment. This capitalist domination that feeds off our dehumanization, treading our human dignity, reminds us, that just like on this historical date of March 8th, capitalism is built over our corpses. And that, always, each time our deep, economic class interests are concerned, when even death may come into question, we'll clearly and surely find ourselves standing across from these bourgeois women organized with us in the gender struggle. The only permanent and fruitful unity for us is within our own class, in alliance with the entire people – brothers, friends, comrades. Here and only here can we resolve our problems.

March 8th should never serve the purpose of mixing us with bourgeois women who, in their factories or those of their husbands, feed off our blood! There is no struggle we should carry out with them. Quite the opposite, March 8th should remind us all of the working-class women who fought and gave their lives in 1908; March 8th should remind us of all the working-class women presently suffering the same exploitation, domination, repression within the bourgeois' factories; March 8th should remind us of all the working women dominated in so many other forms in this present society: petty merchants of all sorts, house-workers, peasant women... All, sisters in struggle.

This understanding of March 8th, this understanding of our basic reality calls us to take up our responsibilities! By no means is this a moment for lamentation!

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WOMEN IN THE WORKING-CLASS

Today, March 8th, is for us an opportunity to think together a bit more on our own situation as women, working women, women of the working-class. To begin with, we should be clear on a first thing, a first attitude that is key: this is no moment to lament! It's a moment to try to understand better how we can advance in our battles, while taking into account, with all the rigor necessary, our specificity as women.

Roles and Responsibilities. In our class, as in all classes, women play an important role in the class' physical reproduction. We're the ones who give birth to the future workers and, during the whole period of upraising, we're the ones who bear the brunt of this responsibility. In the home, we have numerous responsibilities. So, we are extremely important for the class' reproduction as such, although, purposely, we aren't given the fundamental place we in fact hold for the entire society.

In general, in the society we live in, the role we play is practically summed up by our place in the home. Although this is indeed an important function, studying this more deeply, we'll see that we have many more roles and responsibilities within our class. It's important we know them, that we be aware of them, to be able to face them better and better organized.

In countries dominated by imperialism, capitalism's main orientation is to develop assembly industries. Free trade zones are in full expansion, to the point that authorities in some of these countries are even

suggesting changing their whole nations into free trade zones! With this orientation, while the development of local industries hasn't yet totally halted, it has become extremely difficult.

In free trade zone industries, the main tendency is to employ women workers. Various reasons explain this.

To begin with, according to the capitalists involved in this process, women are more submissive and the bosses don't have to face so many protests and struggles in the factory, which allows them more latitude to impose the unbounded exploitation they desire. Also, they believe women have a superior capacity for certain types of work, especially those, like textile and electronics, demanding greater attention. So, they find us more "efficient". Furthermore – and this is as precise as sadistic a calculation – they know that women, once returned home, have so much work to do, they have no time – or, at least, less time than men – to organize. They also know – and perpetuate – that women are often involved in religious activities, which, again, not only leave them little time to organize for the defense of their rights, but also maintain them further yet in the expectation of divine solutions, thus weakening many of our women comrades' spontaneous spirit of combat. The bosses know too that an additional factor they have in hand is sexual harassment. This type of gender domination, in fact, often walks hand in hand with an economic dependency: if women don't accept their passes, they risk losing their jobs. Many women thus find themselves permanently trapped in a high level of fear because of this, and consequently are less willing to risk fighting for their rights. Finally, in the society we're living in, women have much less work opportunities. The factory remains a unique possibility and in order not to lose this rare work chance, there's enormous pressure on our shoulders, for, at home, the earnings of our mates alone don't cover the bills – not to mention when the woman is the only head of the household.

Perspectives: As we can see, the bourgeoisie acts in highly thought-out ways. Its only worry is its profits and, with this simple logic, we, working-class women, are always the worst victims.

We may ask ourselves if it succeeds in its objectives. Certainly, this permanent scheming yields results – and many! But we can't either answer simply that yes, the bourgeoisie is attaining its objectives in this way. Because we're also sure that this state of affairs is necessarily short-lived. Throughout our struggles as women and men, the most important thing we realize is that, in capitalism, we are all enduring terrible heights of exploitation in our flesh and blood – which in turn creates the firm basis for the bravest and most valiant members of the working-class to progressively assume their responsibilities and engage in the organized struggle to confront this exploitation, even hinting at the possibility of its final total elimination. Capitalism is a school of war in which the working-class constantly learns how to battle better. For the time being, our class history's limits hinder us greatly, causing us to perceive the reality we live in, and the future, as totally bleak. Nevertheless, only in the struggle will we develop our ability to fight. It is precisely within this very process that, little by little, accumulating knowledge and, thus, better vision, we'll be able to take in hand our rights, our lives, and our destinies.

Will we encounter difficulties? Beforehand, we can say yes. Society, generally, hasn't shaped us to naturally trust ourselves. Neither has it trained us to be aware of our abilities to organize and battle collectively sufficiently for us to take our complete class destiny into our own hands. Many are the women who say: "if this was done by men, it'd be much better", or "what a pity there aren't any men in this factory!". This is because we're forgetting that practically all the union federations that have

shamelessly sold our classes' struggles were headed by men and only men! This is why we say: men or women can equally be cowards or stooges... just as they can be brave and conscious.

Our lack of experience shouldn't lead us to underestimate ourselves. The most important is that our place in society, our place in production, our place within our own class demands we take our responsibilities in hand and, for this, recover our courage, our character, and set foot in the battle, firmly. In this way, we'll develop our capacities and, in this way, we'll have more confidence in ourselves.

Awareness and Courage

It's important we realize that many women have taken and continue to assume their responsibilities. They, too, have the same household chores, the same prejudices they endure, the same gender domination flooring them. But they've been able to understand and realize, first, that their class interest are the only deep and permanent ones, and further, that firm and consequent struggle is the only way to wrestle their rights, and, finally, that gender domination can only be resolved permanently and truly through their own struggle.

For this, we have to go beyond the limits society imposes us. We can't remain dominated by gender prejudices. We have to fight them, firmly! But also and in permanent articulation with the general struggle for our class interests, within these interests. Many men, whether workers or not, comrades or not, understand this issue quite clearly and are struggling with us in this, without reserve. But we're the first ones who should give the initial step to sustain and advance our demands.

Concretely, we have several characteristics – precisely as women – that heighten our capacities to carry out these tasks. We're the ones who organize our homes, so we have practical experience, not only the developed ability of organization as such but, also, the fact of having to face the problems of the lack of services the State should guarantee us: electricity, water, trash collection... and, especially, the decent housing each family should have a right to. Since we're the ones who take care of our children's schooling, we, once again, are the one confronting the terrible schooling problems our kids have. Also, since we're in charge of going to the market, we're the ones who constantly confront the never-ending increases in the cost of living... Finally, the factory itself, with all its horrors, gives us nevertheless an awareness of the collectiveness of our suffering and the aims to be attained. This is precisely what can help us to develop the **CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS** that is basic for the necessary unity we need, to wage the battle for our rights and, further ahead, for our hegemony as workers.

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LOGIC

Our responsibilities are already tremendous just to improve our immediate work and living conditions. But they don't stop there – they go much further. Haiti is going through terribly difficult moments. It's our duty to analyze and understand them; always, starting from our class interests, articulated with those of the entire people and actively participating towards their resolution. To attain this, not only do we need to define an orientation corresponding to this process, but also we have to organize to make it happen.

The mobilization in Haiti today includes legitimate and totally consequent legal demands. Furthermore, it is organized, determined, and with a high capacity of mobilization. Nevertheless, though the mention of salaries is present amongst the demands, it needs to be placed in its determinant place and consequently, reveal the system's coherence, its intrinsic logic, so we can better fight it.

What's the logic at work? In distant colonial times, the colonialists certainly didn't come to our lands to evangelize or "civilize", but rather to exploit slave labor. Similarly, presently, the imperialists, with local capitalists, come first and foremost to exploit wage labor that, deliberately, they cause to be the cheapest possible in their "third world"

The fact is that branches of the economy that, in the United States, didn't manage, due to their lack of advanced mechanization, to stabilize their benefits according to average rates – particularly, the textile industry, precisely – immediately perceived that they should come to countries like ours to profit of the planned rotting of our local economies and social formations. This rotting has given way, on one hand, to the loss of self-sufficiency, and, on the other, to a wage labor called "free" but that in fact is in quasi-slavery, labeled, in the most shameless way, because of its very low cost attained, a "comparative advantage", within the capitalist "market". This is the logic of the maquilas and free trade zones where our futures are callously planned, where we die, dehumanized, humiliated.

In this, to advance this process, high levels of unemployment are needed, to constantly keep wages down; the high cost of living and depreciation of local currencies, too, to keep real salaries low; education needs to be reduced, to obtain void minds; needed too, is the poverty of the whole people, extreme and generalize, so that anyone, at any time, agrees to receive any kind of salary! Maquilas, free trade zones and inner cities are all part of a single logic!

For this: State repression! To confront popular movements of struggle, strikes, mobilization, demands... however legitimate they may be. State repression guarantees IMF and World Bank "adjustments", guarantees the stealing the banks and the state apparatus operate. But above all, State repression in the factories guarantees their profits! Maquilas, free trade zones, inner cities and State policy: all are part of a single logic, that of **exploitation!**

This is why it's urgent we understand quite clearly our importance, as women and workers. Not for the dull reason of "being important" but rather because, due to deep historical and structural reasons, we are, today, in a very specific position of great importance: that of being the main workers of the maquilas and free trade zones, a key and essential element of the entire system.

... we have to diffuse this information, have it understood, interiorized and realized by all our comrades in our homes, work, neighborhoods, just as, with them, we have to attain CLASS UNITY, along with our allies in the entire People, within our Camp, nationally and internationally.

... we have the opportunity to play the highest role, humanly speaking, to transform this knowledge, this understanding, this awareness... into MOBILIZING MATTER and thus attain, through our struggles, the hopes of humanity in its entirety.

**DOWN WITH THE RECUPERATED AND ALIENATING MARCH 8TH!
FORWARD MARCH 8TH, DAY OF THE COMBATANT WORKING WOMAN!
FORWARD THE STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING-CLASS!
FORWARD THE WORKERS' COMBATIVE STRUGGLE!
FORWARD THE VALIANT PEOPLES' STRUGGLE!**

Batay Ouvriye, March 2006