

NOTES FOR A FEMINIST MANIFESTO

IN SPRING 2018, Facebook billionaire Sheryl Sandberg was counselling women that toughness and success in the business world was the royal road to gender equality.¹ If only ‘half of all countries and companies were run by women, and half of all homes were run by men’, the world would be a better place and we shouldn’t be satisfied until we reach that goal. A leading exponent of corporate feminism, Sandberg had made her name by urging women managers to ‘lean in’ at the company boardroom, at the summit of a career that had led from Harvard via the Treasury Secretary’s office to data-harvesting and ad-targeting at Google and Facebook, with the help of mentor Lawrence Summers, chief deregulator of Wall Street.

That same spring, on 8 March 2018, a countrywide feminist strike brought Spain to a halt. Joined by five million marchers, the organizers of *la huelga feminista* called for ‘a society free of sexist oppression, exploitation and violence’—‘for rebellion and struggle against the alliance of the patriarchy and capitalism that wants us to be obedient, submissive and quiet.’ As the sun set over Madrid and Barcelona and crowds of cheering women filled the streets, feminist strikers announced: ‘On March 8 we cross our arms and interrupt all productive and reproductive activity.’ They refused to accept worse working conditions than men or less pay for the same work.

These two calls represent opposing paths for the feminist movement. Sandberg and her ilk see feminism as a handmaiden of capitalism. They want a world in which the benefits of exploitation in the workplace and oppression in the social order are equally shared between ruling-class men and women—a form of ‘equal-opportunity domination’. In sharp

contrast, the organizers of the feminist strike are calling for an end to capitalist—and patriarchal—domination.

Fork in the road

Faced with these two visions of feminism, we find ourselves at a fork in the road. One path leads to a scorched planet where human life is immiserated, if it remains possible at all. The other points to the sort of world that has always figured in humanity's dreams: one whose wealth and natural resources are shared by all, where equality and freedom are premises, not aspirations. What makes the choice so pressing is the disappearance of any middle way, due to the predatory form of financialized neoliberal capitalism that has held sway for the last forty years—raising the stakes for every social struggle and turning efforts to win modest reforms into pitched battles for survival. In these conditions feminists, like everyone else, must take a stand. Will we continue to pursue 'equal-opportunity domination' while the planet burns? Or will we reimagine gender justice in an anti-capitalist form, which leads beyond the present carnage to a new society?

Our Manifesto is a brief for the second path. What makes an anti-capitalist feminism thinkable today is the political dimension of the present crisis: the erosion of elite credibility throughout the world, affecting not only the centrist neoliberal parties but also their Sandberg-style corporate-feminist allies. This was the feminism that foundered in the US presidential election of 2016, when the 'historic' candidacy of Hillary Clinton failed to elicit the enthusiasm of women voters. For good reason: Clinton personified the disconnect between elite women's ascension to high office and improvements in the lives of the vast majority.

Clinton's defeat is our wake-up call. Exposing the bankruptcy of liberal feminism, it represents a historic opening for a challenge from the left. In the current vacuum of liberal hegemony, we have the chance to build another feminism and to re-define what counts as a feminist issue, developing a different class orientation and a radical-transformative ethos. We write not to sketch an imagined utopia, but to clarify the road that must be travelled to reach a just society. We aim to explain

¹This is an edited extract from *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto* by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser, to be published by Verso in 2019.

why feminists should choose the road of the feminist strikes, unite with other anti-capitalist and anti-systemic movements and become a ‘feminism for the 99 per cent’. What gives us hope for this project now are the stirrings of a new global wave, with the international feminist strikes of 2017–18 and the increasingly coordinated movements that are developing around them. As a first step, we set out eleven theses on the present conjuncture and the bases for a radical, new, anti-capitalist feminist movement.

THESIS I

A new feminist wave is reinventing the strike.

The feminist-strike movement began in Poland in October 2016, when over a hundred thousand women staged walkouts and marches to oppose that country’s ban on abortion. Later that month, it crossed the ocean to Argentina, where striking women protested the murder of Lucía Pérez with the militant cry ‘Ni Una Menos’. Soon it spread to Italy, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, Peru, the US, Mexico and Chile. Having begun in the streets, it surged through workplaces and schools, eventually engulfing the worlds of show business and media, politics and IT. For the last two years, its slogans have resonated around the globe: Nosotras Paramos, We Strike, Vivas Nos Queremos, Ni Una Menos, Feminism for the 99 per cent. At first a ripple, then a wave, it has become a global phenomenon.

What turned a series of nationally based actions into a transnational movement was the decision to strike together on 8 March 2017. With that bold stroke, this new form of activism has re-politicized International Women’s Day, reconnecting it to its all but forgotten historical roots in working-class and socialist feminism. Their actions evoke the spirit of early twentieth-century working-class women’s mobilization—paradigmatically, the US strikes and mass demonstrations, led mostly by immigrant and Jewish women, which inspired American socialists to organize the first National Woman’s Day, while in Germany Luise Zietz and Clara Zetkin called for an International Working Women Day. Embodying that militant spirit, the feminist strikes of today are uniting women separated not only by borders and fences, but oceans, mountains and continents. Breaking through the isolation of domestic and

symbolic walls, they demonstrate the political potential of those whose paid and unpaid work sustains the world.

The movement has invented new ways to strike, while infusing the strike form itself with a new kind of politics. By combining the withdrawal of labour with marches, small-business closures, blockades and boycotts, it is replenishing the repertoire of the general strike as a mode of protest—once large, but shrunk by decades of neoliberal aggression. At the same time, it is democratizing the strike and broadening its scope by redefining what counts as ‘labour’. Beyond waged work, women’s strike activism is also withdrawing domestic labour, sex and ‘smiles’—making visible the indispensable role played by gendered, unpaid work in capitalist society by valorizing activities from which capital benefits but for which it does not pay. With respect to paid work, too, the feminist strike is redefining what counts as a labour issue—targeting not just wages and hours, but sexual harassment and assault, barriers to reproductive justice and curbs on the right to strike.

This new feminist militancy thus has the potential to overcome the stubborn and divisive opposition between ‘identity politics’ and ‘class politics’. Disclosing the unity of the workplace and social life, it refuses to limit its struggle to just one of those spaces. Redefining what counts as ‘work’ and who counts as a ‘worker’, it rejects capitalism’s structural undervaluation of women’s labour, both paid and unpaid. It anticipates the possibility of a new phase of class struggle: feminist, internationalist, environmentalist and anti-racist.

Women’s-strike feminism has erupted at a time when trade unions in manufacturing have been badly weakened. Resistance against neoliberalism has shifted to other arenas: healthcare, education, pensions, housing—the labour and services necessary to reproduce human beings and social communities. From the strike wave of US teachers to the struggle against water privatization in Ireland and the protests of Dalit sanitation workers in India, it is here that we find the most militant fightbacks—led and powered by women. Although not formally affiliated with the international women’s strike movement, these struggles have much in common with it. They, too, want to valorize the work that is necessary to reproduce our lives, while opposing its exploitation. They combine wage and workplace demands with calls for increased public spending on social services.

In Argentina, Spain and Italy, women's-strike feminism has attracted broad support from forces opposing austerity, protesting against the defunding of schools, healthcare, housing, transport and environmental protections. Opposing government assaults on 'public goods' imposed at finance capital's behest, women's strikes are becoming the catalyst and model for broad-based efforts to defend our communities—demanding bread, but roses too.

THESIS 2

Liberal feminism is bankrupt. Time to get over it.

This militant new wave is a far cry from the corporate feminism that has predominated in recent decades. Nevertheless, the mainstream media still equates feminism as such with the liberal model. The effect is to sow confusion, for liberal feminism is part of the problem. Based on women in the professional-managerial strata, liberal feminism is focused on 'leaning in' and 'cracking the glass ceiling'. Dedicated to enabling a privileged few to climb the corporate ladder or the ranks of the military, it subscribes to a market-centred view of equality that dovetails with corporate enthusiasm for 'diversity'. Anti-discrimination and pro-choice, liberal feminism refuses to address the socio-economic constraints on choice and equality. An ally of neoliberalism, it fails to benefit the majority of women; if anything, it actually harms them.

The aim of liberal feminism is meritocracy, not equality. Rather than abolish social hierarchy, it aims to feminize it, ensuring women at the top can attain parity with the men of their own class. By definition, its beneficiaries will be those who already possess considerable social, cultural and economic advantages. Compatible with ballooning inequality of wealth and income, liberal feminism supplies a progressive sheen for neoliberalism, cloaking its regressive policies with a chimera of emancipation. An ally of Islamophobia in Europe and of global finance in the United States, liberal feminism enables professional-managerial women to 'lean in' only because they can lean *on* poorly paid, migrant and working-class women, to whom they subcontract caregiving and housework.

Insensitive to class and race, lean-in feminism links our cause with elitism and individualism. Projecting feminism as a stand-alone movement,

it associates us with policies that harm the majority and cuts us off from struggles that oppose those policies. In short, liberal feminism gives feminism a bad name. Our answer is kick-back feminism—we have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling, while leaving the majority of women to clean up the shards.

THESIS 3

We need an anti-capitalist feminism—a feminism for the 99 per cent.

The militant feminism of the international women's strike confronts a crisis of epochal proportions: plummeting living standards and looming ecological disaster; wars and dispossession; mass migrations met with barbed wire; emboldened racism and xenophobia; the reversal of hard-won rights. The feminism we envisage grasps the extent of these challenges and aspires to meet them. Eschewing half-measures, it champions the needs and rights of the many: of working-class, racialized and migrant women; of queer, trans, poor and disabled women; of women encouraged to see themselves as 'middle-class' even as capital exploits them. It does not limit itself to 'women's issues', as traditionally defined. Standing for all who are exploited, dominated and oppressed, it can be a source of hope for the majority of humanity—a feminism for the 99 per cent.

The new feminism is emerging within the crucible of lived experience, informed by theoretical reflection. It is becoming clear that the only way women and gender non-conforming people can gain access to fundamental rights is by transforming the underlying social system that hollows out those rights. Legalization of abortion alone is not sufficient for women who have neither the means to pay for it nor access to clinics; universal reproductive justice also requires free, universal healthcare and an end to eugenicist practices in the medical profession. Likewise, wage equality can mean only equality in misery to poor and working-class women, unless it comes with substantive labour rights, jobs that pay a generous living wage and a new organization of house- and carework. Laws criminalizing gender violence are a sham if they turn a blind eye to police brutality, mass incarceration, deportation threats, military interventions, and harassment and abuse in the workplace.

Legal emancipation is an empty shell if it does not include public services, social housing and funds to ensure that women can leave domestic and workplace violence.

For these reasons, feminism ‘for the 99 per cent’ cannot be a separatist movement. It will join with every movement that fights for the many, whether in the domain of environmental justice, education, housing, labour rights and healthcare, or in opposing war and racism. We are not in competition with class struggle—on the contrary, we are right in the thick of it, even as we are helping to redefine it in a new, more capacious way.

THESIS 4

We are living through a crisis of society as a whole—and its root cause is capitalism.

The 2008 financial crisis is widely perceived as the worst since the 1930s, but that understanding is still too narrow. What we are living through is a crisis of society as a whole—of the economy, ecology, politics and ‘care’. A general crisis of an entire form of social organization, it is at bottom a crisis of capitalism—and in particular, of the form of capitalism we inhabit today: globalized, financialized, neoliberal. That capitalism periodically generates such crises is not accidental. Not only does this system live by exploiting wage labour and leveraging the surplus, it also free-rides on nature, public goods and the unwaged work that reproduces human beings and communities. Driven by the pursuit of profit, capital expands by helping itself without paying for their replacement, unless forced to do so. Primed to degrade nature, instrumentalize public goods and commandeer unwaged carework, it periodically destabilizes the conditions of its—and our—survival.

Today’s crisis of capitalism is especially acute, after decades of declining wages, weakened labour rights, damage to the environment and usurpation of the energies available to sustain families and communities—while the tentacles of finance have spread through the whole social fabric. No wonder that so many are now rejecting the establishment parties and trying out new perspectives and political projects. The result is a growing

hegemonic crisis, a vacuum of leadership and organization, and a sense that something must give.

Women's-strike feminism is among the forces that have leapt into this breach. But we do not command the terrain. Upstart right-wing movements promise to improve the lot of ordinary families (of a given ethnicity) by ending free trade, curtailing immigration and restricting the rights of women, people of colour and LGBTQ+ people. Meanwhile, the ruling currents of the liberal centre have an equally unsavoury agenda: they want feminists, anti-racists and environmentalists to close ranks with their liberal 'protectors' and forego egalitarian projects of social transformation. We decline that proposal. Rejecting not only reactionary populism but also its progressive-neoliberal opponents, we intend to identify, and confront head-on, the real source of crisis and misery: namely, the capitalist system itself.

A crisis is not 'only' a time of suffering. It is also a moment of awakening and an opportunity for social transformation, when critical masses of people withdraw their support from the powers-that-be and search for new ideas and alliances. The process whereby general crisis leads to societal reorganization has played out repeatedly in modern history, with capitalism reinventing itself again and again. In their attempts to restore profitability, its political champions have reconfigured not only the official economy but also politics, social reproduction and our relation to non-human nature. They have restructured the prevailing forms of class exploitation and of gender and racial oppression. Reinventing those hierarchies, they have often managed to channel rebellious energies, including feminist energies, into support for the new status quo.

Will this process be repeated? Today's ruling elites appear especially dangerous. Focused on short-term profits, they seem unwilling to gauge not only the depth of the crisis but also the threat it poses to the long-term health of the system itself. They would rather drill for oil in the here and now than ensure the ecological preconditions for their own future profits. As a result, the crisis we confront today is a crisis of life as we know it. The struggle to resolve it poses the most fundamental questions of social organization. Where to draw the line delimiting economy from society, society from nature, production from reproduction, and work from family? How to use the social surplus we collectively produce?

And who should decide these matters? It remains to be seen whether profit-makers will manage to turn capitalism's social contradictions into new opportunities for accumulating private wealth, co-opting strands of feminism even as they reorganize the gender hierarchy—or whether a mass revolt, with feminists at the forefront, will, as Walter Benjamin put it, 'apply the emergency brake'.

THESIS 5

Gender oppression in capitalist societies is rooted in the subordination of social reproduction to production for profit. We want to turn things right-side up.

Many people know that capitalist societies are by definition class societies, which license a small minority to accumulate private profits by exploiting the much larger group who must work for wages. What is less widely understood is that they are also wellsprings of gender oppression, with sexism hard-wired into their structures. Capitalism did not invent the subordination of women, which has existed in different modes in all previous class societies. But capitalism established new, distinctively modern forms of sexism, underpinned by new institutional structures. The key innovation was to separate the making of people from the making of profit, to assign the first job to women, and to subordinate it to the second.

The perversity becomes clear when we recall how vital and complex the work of people-making actually is. Not only does this activity create and sustain human life in the biological sense; it also creates and sustains our capacity to work—what Marx called our 'labour power'. And that means fashioning people with the 'right' attitudes, dispositions and values; abilities, competences and skills. All told, people-making work supplies some fundamental preconditions—material, cultural, social—for human society in general and for capitalist production in particular. Without it, neither life nor labour power could be embodied in human beings. We call this vast body of vital activity *social reproduction*.

In capitalist societies, the crucial importance of social reproduction is disguised and disavowed. The making of people is treated as a mere

means to the making of profit. Because capital avoids paying for this work as far as it can, while treating money as the end-all and be-all, it relegates those who perform it to a subordinate position relative not just to the owners of capital but also to those more privileged waged workers who can offload the responsibility for it onto others. Those 'others' are largely female. In contemporary societies, social reproduction is gendered—assigned to or associated with women. Its organization depends on gender roles and entrenches gender oppression.

Social reproduction is therefore a feminist issue. But it is also shot through by fault lines of class and race, sexuality and nation. A feminism aimed at resolving the current crisis must understand social reproduction through a perspective that comprehends, and connects, these multiple axes of domination. Capitalist societies have long instituted racial divisions of reproductive labour. Whether via slavery or colonialism, apartheid or neo-imperialism, this system has coerced racialized women to provide such labour *gratis* or at low cost for their majority-ethnicity or white 'sisters'. Forced to lavish care on the children and homes of their mistresses or employers, they have had to struggle all the harder to care for their own.

The class character of social reproduction is fundamental. Capital accumulation depends as much on the social relations that produce and replenish labour as on those that directly exploit it. Class, in other words, is not 'merely economic'. It is made up of concrete people, their communities, habitats and living conditions, their experiences, social ties and history, all produced and reproduced by activities that far transcend the economic—not just relations of production but also relations of social reproduction. The global working class doesn't just comprise those who work for wages in factories or mines; it also includes those who work in the fields and in private homes; in offices, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, nurseries and schools; the precariat, the unemployed and those who receive no pay in return for their work. Likewise, class struggle is not just about economic gains in the workplace; it includes struggles over social reproduction. While these have always been central, social-reproduction struggles are especially explosive today, as neoliberalism demands more hours of waged work per household while withdrawing state support for social welfare, squeezing families, communities and, above all, women to breaking-point. Under these conditions, struggles

over social reproduction have moved to centre stage, with the potential to alter society root and branch.

THESIS 6

Gender violence takes many forms, all of them entangled with capitalist social relations. We vow to fight them all.

Researchers estimate that one in three women, globally, will have experienced some form of gender violence in the course of their lifetimes. Many of the perpetrators are intimate partners, who are responsible for 38 per cent of murders of women. Physical, emotional, sexual or all three, intimate-partner violence is found in every country, class and racial-ethnic group. Rooted in the contradictory dynamics of family and personal life, and thus in capitalism's signature division between people-making and profit-making, it reflects the shift from the extended kin-based households of an earlier time, in which male elders held the power of life and death over their dependents, to the restricted, heterosexual nuclear family of capitalist modernity, which vests an attenuated right of rule in the 'smaller' men who head smaller households. That shift changed the character of kin-based gender violence. What was once overtly political now became 'private': more informal and psychological—hence, less 'rational', socially sanctioned and controlled. Often fuelled by alcohol, shame and anxiety about maintaining dominance, this sort of gender violence becomes especially virulent and pervasive in times of crisis. When status anxiety, economic precarity and political uncertainty loom large, the gender order, too, appears to tremble. Some men experience women as 'out of control', their homes 'disordered', their children 'wild'. Their bosses are unrelenting, their co-workers unjustly favoured, their jobs at risk. Their sexual prowess and powers of seduction are in doubt. Their masculinity threatened, they explode.

Not all gender violence takes this apparently 'irrational' form. Other types are all too 'rational': the weaponization of the rape of enslaved and colonized women to terrorize communities of colour and enforce their subjugation; the repeated rape of sex workers by traffickers and pimps to 'break them in'; the coordinated mass rape of 'enemy' women as a weapon of war; and not least, the prevalence of sexual harassment at

work or school. In that last case, the perpetrators have public institutional power over those on whom they prey. They can command sexual services, and so they do. Here, the root is women's economic, professional, political and racial vulnerability, our dependence on the paycheque, the reference, the willingness of the employer or foreman not to ask about immigration status. What enables this violence is a system of hierarchical power that fuses gender, race and class.

These two kinds of gender violence share a common structural basis in capitalist society. What underlies them both is the division—and mutual calibration—between commodity production, for profit, and social reproduction, for 'love'. The gendered nexus that assigns reproductive work overwhelmingly to women disadvantages us *vis-à-vis* men in the world of productive work, where we often land in dead-end jobs that don't pay enough to support a family. The primary beneficiary is capital; but its effect is to render us doubly subject to violation—at the hands of familial and personal intimates, on the one hand, and of capital's enforcers and enablers, on the other.

A common feminist response to gender violence is the demand for criminalization and punishment. This sort of 'carceral feminism' takes for granted precisely what needs to be called into question: that the law, police and courts are sufficiently autonomous of the capitalist power-structure to counter its deep-seated tendency to generate and tolerate gender violence. In fact, the criminal-justice system disproportionately targets poor and working-class men of colour, including migrants, while often letting their white-collar professional counterparts go free. Likewise, anti-trafficking campaigns and laws against 'sexual slavery' are often used to deport migrant women, while their rapists and profiteers remain at large. Equally important, the carceral response overlooks the necessity of exit options. Laws criminalizing marital rape or workplace assault won't help women with nowhere else to go or no way to get there. Market-based solutions—promoting women's economic independence through micro-loans—do little to help women gain real autonomy from the men in their families, while increasing their dependence on their creditors.

We reject both the carceral-feminist and the liberal-market approach. Sexual violence under capitalism is not a disruption of the regular order of things, but a constitutive part of it—a systemic condition, not a

criminal or interpersonal problem. It cannot be understood in isolation from the bio-political violence of laws that deny reproductive freedom, the economic violence of the market, the state violence of police and border guards, the inter-state violence of imperial armies, the symbolic violence of capitalist culture and the slow environmental violence that eats away at our bodies, communities and habitats. In export-processing zones and other sectors that rely heavily on women workers, gender violence is commonly deployed as a tool of labour discipline: managers use rape, verbal abuse and humiliating body searches to enforce speed-ups and crush labour organizing. These dynamics have worsened during the present period of capitalist crisis, as governments have slashed public funding, marketized public services and refamilialized the burden of care. In these circumstances, repeated admonitions to be a 'good' mother or a 'good' wife can turn into justifications for violence against those who fail to conform to gender roles.

Gender violence has deep-seated structural roots in a social order that entwines women's subordination with the gendered organization of work and the dynamics of capital accumulation. In this perspective, the MeToo movement represents a form of class struggle. As noted by the immigrant farmworkers who offered the first statement of solidarity with the women in show business, Harvey Weinstein was not simply a predator, but a powerful *boss*, able to dictate who would work in Hollywood and who would not.

Violence in all its forms is integral to capitalist society, which sustains itself through a mix of coercion and constructed consent. One form of violence cannot be stopped without stopping the others. Committed to eradicating them all, women's-strike feminists connect the struggle against sexual violence to the fight against all forms of violence in capitalist society—and against the social system that undergirds them.

THESIS 7

Capitalism tries to regulate sexuality. We want to liberate it.

At first sight, struggles around sexuality today present an unambiguous choice. On one side, the forces of reaction seek to outlaw sexual practices that violate family values or divine law, with threats to stone

‘adulterers’, flog lesbians or subject gays to conversion therapy. On the other, liberalism fights for the legal rights of sexual dissidents and minorities, recognition of once-tabooed relationships, marriage equality and LGBTQ+ rights within the military. Whereas the reactionaries aim to rehabilitate regressive archaisms—patriarchy, homophobia, sexual repression—the liberals stand for modernity: individual freedom, self-expression, sexual diversity.

Yet neither side is what it appears. Today’s sexual authoritarianism is anything but archaic. The prohibitions it aims to impose are neo-traditional responses to capitalist development, up to and including neoliberalism. By the same token, the sexual rights that liberalism promotes are conceived in terms that presuppose capitalist forms of modernity—at once normalizing and consumerist.

Capitalist societies have always tried to organize sexuality. Before capitalist relations were pervasively established, pre-existing authorities—especially churches and communities—were tasked with establishing and enforcing the norms that distinguished acceptable from sinful sex. Later, as capitalism proceeded to reshape the whole of society, it incubated new, bourgeois norms and modes of regulation, including state-sanctioned gender binarism and heteronormativity. These ‘modern’ norms were broadly diffused—by colonialism, mass culture and the criteria of entitlement to family-based social provision. But they did not go unchallenged. On the contrary, they collided both with older sexual regimes and with newer aspirations for sexual freedom, which found expression in gay and lesbian subcultures and avant-garde milieux.

Later developments restructured that configuration. Bourgeois norms have softened, while the liberationist current has gone mainstream, and dominant factions of both have united in a new project: to normalize once-taboo sexual practices within an expanded zone of state regulation, in capital-friendly forms that encourage individualism, domesticity and commodity consumption. Behind this reconfiguration lies a shift in the nature of capitalism. Increasingly financialized, de-territorialized and de-familialized, capital is no longer implacably opposed to queer and non-cis sex/gender formations. Large corporations now permit their employees to live outside heterosexual families—provided they toe the line at the workplace and the mall.

This is the context for present-day struggles around sexuality. It is a time of increasing gender fluidity among the young, growing queer and feminist movements and significant legal victories. Formal gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights and marriage equality are now enshrined in law in many countries. The outcome of hard-fought battles, these victories also reflect social and cultural changes associated with neoliberalism. Nevertheless, they are inherently fragile. New legal rights do not stop the assault on LGBTQ+ people, who continue to experience gender and sexual violence, symbolic misrecognition and social discrimination. Financialized capitalism is itself fuelling a sexual backlash: right-wing populists can identify real downsides of capitalist modernity, including its failures to protect ‘their’ families and communities from the ravages of the market. But they twist legitimate grievances to promote the sort of opposition that capital can well afford. Theirs is a mode of ‘protection’ that pins the rap on sexual freedom, while obscuring the threat from capital itself.

Sexual reaction finds its mirror image in sexual liberalism, which—even in the best-case scenarios—is linked to structures that deprive the majority of the material prerequisites needed to realize their formal freedoms. It also relies upon regulatory regimes that normalize the monogamous family, the price of acceptance for gays and lesbians. Seeming to valorize individual freedom, sexual liberalism leaves unchallenged the structural conditions that fuel homophobia and transphobia, including the role of the family in social reproduction. New heterosexual cultures, based on hook-ups and online dating, urge young women to ‘own’ their sexuality, but continue to rate them by their looks and pressure girls to pleasure boys, licensing male sexual selfishness in exemplary capitalist fashion. New forms of ‘gay normality’ presuppose capitalist normality, with the appearance of a gay middle class defined by its modes of consumption and claim to respectability. Its existence is invoked as a sign of ‘enlightened Western tolerance’ to legitimate neocolonial projects. For example, Israeli agencies cite their superior ‘gay-friendly’ culture to justify the subjugation of ‘backward, homophobic’ Palestinians, while European liberals invoke it as grounds for Islamophobia.

Feminists for the 99 per cent refuse to play this game. Rejecting both neoliberal cooptation and neo-traditional homophobia and misogyny, we

want to revive the radical spirit of Stonewall, of 'sex-positive' currents of feminism from Alexandra Kollontai to Gayle Rubin, and of the historic gay-and-lesbian support campaign for the UK miners' strike. We fight to liberate sexuality from procreation and normative family forms, but also from the deformations of consumerism. That demands a new, non-capitalist social order that will assure the material bases of sexual liberation, including generous public support for social reproduction, redesigned for the widest range of families and personal associations.

THESIS 8

Capitalism was born amid racist and colonial violence. Feminism for the 99 per cent is anti-racist and anti-imperialist.

Today, as in previous moments of capitalist crisis, 'race' has become a red-hot issue. Aggressive ethno-nationalisms dispense with dog whistles in favour of full-throated blasts of white supremacy. Centrist governments join their racist counterparts in blocking the entry of migrants and refugees, seizing their children and separating their families, or leaving them to drown at sea. Police forces continue to murder people of colour with impunity, while courts lock them up in record numbers. Some have tried to fight back, turning out in force to protest against anti-black police violence and shows of strength by white supremacists. In the US, some are struggling to give new meaning to the term 'abolition', demanding an end to incarceration and the elimination of ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency consolidated under Bush's Department of Homeland Security.

In this situation feminists, like everyone else, must take sides. Historically, however, the feminist record in dealing with race has been mixed at best. Influential white US suffragists delivered racist rants after the Civil War, when black men were granted the vote and they were not. Well into the twentieth century, leading British feminists defended colonial rule in India on 'civilizational' grounds, to 'raise up brown women from their lowly condition'. Prominent European feminists justify anti-Muslim policies in similar terms today. Even when not intentionally racist, liberal and radical feminists have defined 'sexism' and 'gender issues' in ways that falsely universalize the situation of white middle-class women. Abstracting gender from race and class, they have proclaimed women's

need to escape from domesticity and 'go out to work', as if all of us were white suburban housewives. Following the same logic, leading feminists in the US have insisted that black women could only be truly feminist if they prioritized an imagined non-racial sisterhood over anti-racist solidarity with black men.

Thanks to decades of determined push-back by feminists of colour, such views are increasingly seen for what they are and rejected by growing numbers of feminists of every hue. Acknowledging this shameful history, we resolve to break decisively with it. We understand that nothing deserving the name of 'women's liberation' can be achieved in a racist, imperialist society. But we also understand that the root of the problem is capitalism: racism and imperialism are not incidental but integral to it. A system that prides itself on free labour and the wage contract relied from the outset on violent colonial plunder, the commercial 'hunting of black skins' in Africa and their forcible conscription into New World slavery. The racialized expropriation of unfree or dependent peoples has served ever since as a hidden condition for the profitable exploitation of free labour. That distinction has assumed different forms throughout capitalism's history—in slavery, colonialism, apartheid and the international division of labour. But in every phase it has coincided, roughly but unmistakably, with the global colour line. In every phase, too, imperialist depredation has enabled capital to increase profits by ensuring its access to natural resources and human capacities for whose reproduction it does not pay. Capitalism has created classes of racialized human beings, whose persons and work are devalued and subject to expropriation. A feminism that is truly anti-racist and anti-imperialist must be anti-capitalist as well.

That proposition could not be more relevant today, when financialized capitalism promotes racial oppression through dispossession by debt. In the Global South, debt-fuelled corporate land grabs drive indigenous and tribal peoples from their lands, while IMF structural adjustment slashes social spending and condemns future generations to toil to repay global lenders. In these ways, racialized expropriation continues in tandem with a rise in exploitation, propelled by the relocation of manufacturing to the Global South. In the North, too, as precarious service work replaces unionized industrial labour, wages fall below living costs and workers are targeted for hyper-expropriative payday loans, racialized expropriation continues apace. Here, too, tax

revenues previously dedicated to public infrastructure are diverted to debt service, with disastrous effects for communities of colour—effects that are deeply gendered, too.

In this situation, abstract proclamations of global sisterhood are counter-productive. Treating the goal of a political process as if it were given at the outset, they convey a false impression of homogeneity. The reality is that, although we all suffer misogynist oppression in capitalist society, our oppression assumes different forms. The links between these forms of oppression must be revealed politically, through conscious efforts to build solidarity. Only in this way, by struggling in and through our diversity, can we achieve the combined power needed to transform society.

THESIS 9

Fighting to reverse capital's destruction of the Earth, our feminism is eco-socialist.

Today's crisis of capitalism is also ecological. As we have argued, capitalism is primed to expropriate nature without regard for replenishment, and periodically destabilizes its own ecological conditions of possibility—exhausting the soil, depleting mineral wealth, poisoning the water and the air. Climate change today is the outcome of capital's resort to fossilized energy to power its factories. It was not humanity in general but capital that ripped out carbonized deposits, formed beneath the crust of the earth over hundreds of millions of years, and consumed them in the blink of an eye. Shifts from coal to oil, and then to natural gas and fracking, have ramped up carbon emissions while disproportionately offloading the 'externalities' onto poor communities, all in pursuit of profit.

Women occupy the frontlines of the present ecological crisis, making up 80 per cent of climate refugees. In the Global South, they constitute the majority of the rural workforce and shoulder the burden of social-reproductive labour. Because of their key role in providing food, clothing and shelter, they bear the brunt of drought, pollution and the over-exploitation of land. Poor women of colour in the Global North are also disproportionately vulnerable to environmental racism, constituting the backbone of communities subject to flooding and lead poisoning.

Women are also at the forefront of struggles against climate change and pollution: the fight of the Water Protectors against the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States; the Peruvian Máxima Acuña's successful battle against US mining giant Newmont; the battle of Garhwali women in North India against the construction of three hydroelectric dams; and the myriad struggles across the globe against the privatization of water and seeds, and for the preservation of biodiversity and sustainable farming. These are new forms of struggle that challenge the tendency of mainstream environmentalism to oppose the defence of 'nature' to the material well-being of human communities. Refusing to separate ecological issues from issues of social reproduction, these women-led movements represent a powerful anti-corporate and anti-capitalist alternative to 'green-capitalist' projects promoting speculative trade in emission permits, carbon offsets and environmental derivatives. Instead, they focus on the real world, in which social justice, the well-being of human communities and the sustainability of nonhuman nature are inextricably bound together. The liberation of women and the preservation of our planet from ecological disaster go hand in hand.

THESIS IO

Capitalism is incompatible with real democracy and peace. Our answer is feminist internationalism.

Today's crisis is also political. Captured by corporate power and enfeebled by debt, political institutions increasingly dance to the tune of central banks and international investors, energy magnates and war profiteers. Political crisis, too, is rooted in the institutional structure of capitalist society. Capitalism divides the political from the economic, the legitimate violence of the state from the silent compulsion of the market. The effect is to declare vast swathes of social life off-limits to democratic control, turning them over instead to corporate domination. By its structure, the system deprives us of the ability to decide collectively what and how much to produce, how to organize the work of social reproduction. Capitalism, in sum, is fundamentally anti-democratic. It necessarily generates an imperialist world geography, licensing more powerful states to prey on the weaker, crushing them with debt.

Capital everywhere freeloards off public power, availing itself of legal regimes that secure private property, repressive forces that suppress opposition and regulatory agencies tasked with managing crisis. At the same time, the thirst for profit periodically tempts some factions of the capitalist class to rebel against public power, as inferior to the market. In such cases, when short-term interests trump long-term survival, capital is like a tiger that eats its own tail. Today, capitalism's tendency to generate political crisis has reached a new pitch. Neoliberal regimes wield the weapon of debt as they target any political forces that might challenge their programme—nullifying massive popular votes that reject austerity, as in Greece, for example.

Women are again major casualties of this crisis and central actors in the struggle for democracy and peace. For us, however, the solution is not just to install more women in the citadels of power. Having long been excluded from the public sphere, we have had to fight tooth and nail to be heard on matters that have been routinely dismissed as 'private'. Often, however, our claims are ventriloquized by elite progressives who inflect them in terms favourable to capital. We are invited to vote for women politicians and to celebrate their ascent to power, as if it struck a blow for our liberation. But for us there is nothing feminist about women who facilitate the work of bombing other countries and backing neo-colonial interventions in the name of humanitarianism, while remaining silent about the genocides perpetrated by their own governments. Women are the first victims of war and imperial occupation throughout the world. They face systematic harassment, the murder and maiming of their loved ones, and the destruction of the infrastructures that enabled them to provide for themselves and their families. We stand in solidarity with them. To those who purport to justify their warmongering by claiming to liberate brown and black women, we say: 'Not in our name'.

THESIS II

Feminism for the 99 per cent calls on all radical movements to join together in a common anti-capitalist insurgency.

As feminists, we do not operate in isolation from other movements of resistance and rebellion. We do not distance ourselves from battles against climate change or exploitation in the workplace, nor stand aloof

from struggles against institutional racism and dispossession. These are our struggles, part and parcel of the struggle to dismantle capitalism, without which there can be no end to gender and sexual oppression. For us, the upshot is clear: the new feminism should join forces with other anti-capitalist movements across the globe—with environmentalist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist and LGBTQ+ movements and labour unions, and above all with their anti-capitalist currents.

Refusing the political options capital presents to us, we reject both reactionary populism and progressive neoliberalism. We want to split the progressive neoliberal alliance: separating the mass of less privileged women, immigrants and people of colour from the lean-in feminists, the meritocratic anti-racists and anti-homophobes, the corporate-diversity and green capitalists who have tried to hijack their concerns and inflect them in terms consistent with neoliberalism. We also want to split the reactionary populist bloc: separating working-class communities from the forces promoting militarism, xenophobia and ethnonationalism, which—while presenting themselves as defenders of the ‘common man’—are crypto-neoliberal. In this way, we seek to build an anti-capitalist force that is large and powerful enough to transform society.

Struggle is an opportunity and a school. It can transform those who participate in it, challenging our prior self-understandings and reshaping our view of the world. It can deepen our comprehension of our own oppression—what causes it, who benefits, what must be done to overcome it. The experience of struggle can also prompt us to reinterpret our interests, reframe our hopes, expand our sense of the possible. It can induce us to revise prior understandings of our allies and our enemies. It can broaden the circle of solidarity among the oppressed and sharpen their antagonism to the oppressors.

The operative word here is ‘can’. Everything depends on our ability to develop a guiding perspective that neither simply celebrates nor obliterates the differences among us. *Contra* fashionable ideologies of ‘multiplicity’, the various oppressions we suffer do not form an inchoate plurality. Although each has its own distinctive forms and characteristics, all are rooted in, and reinforced by, the same social system. It is by naming that system as capitalism and joining together to fight against it that we can best overcome the divisions among us that capital cultivates—divisions of culture, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality

and gender. But capitalism must be rightly understood. Industrial wage labour is not the sum total of the working class; nor is its exploitation the be-all and end-all of capitalist domination. To insist on the primacy of that stratum is not to foster but to weaken class solidarity, which is best advanced by reciprocal recognition of our disparate structural situations, experiences and sufferings; of our specific needs, desires and demands; of the varied organizational forms through which we can best achieve them. The feminism we fight for seeks to overcome stale oppositions between identity politics and class politics. Rejecting the zero-sum framework which capitalism constructs for us, feminists for the 99 per cent aim to unite existing and future movements into a broad-based global insurgency.

Previous texts in NLR's 'New Masses, New Media' series have included Göran Therborn, 'New Masses?' (NLR 85); André Singer, 'Rebellion in Brazil' (NLR 85); Erdem Yörük and Murat Yüksel, 'Class and Politics in Turkey's Gezi Protests' (NLR 89); Bhaskar Sunkara, 'Project Jacobin' (NLR 90); Evgeny Morozov, 'Socialize the Data Centres!' (NLR 91); Joshua Wong, 'Scholarism on the March' and Sebastian Veg, 'Legalistic and Utopian: Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement' (NLR 92); Pablo Iglesias, 'Understanding Podemos' and interview, 'Spain on the Edge' (NLR 93); Francis Mulhern, 'A Party of Latecomers' (NLR 93); Daniel Finn, 'Water Wars in Ireland' and Georgi Derluguian & Zhanna Andreasyan, 'Fuel Protests in Armenia' (NLR 95); Stathis Kouvelakis, 'Syriza's Rise and Fall' (NLR 97); Suhas Palshikar, 'Who is Delhi's Common Man?' (NLR 98); Catarina Martins, 'The Portuguese Experiment' (NLR 106); Cengiz Gunes, 'Turkey's New Left' (NLR 107); Susan Watkins, 'Which Feminisms?' (NLR 109); Beatriz García et al., 'Spain's Feminist Strike' (NLR 110); and Richard Stallman, 'Talking to the Mailman' (NLR 113).