

IWD 2017: Celebrating a new revolution

Petrograd, 1917

The women of Petrograd in 1917 made International Women's Day their day for going out on strike for bread and peace and an end to Czarist rule. They were angry and defiant in the face of the regime, which was consuming society to fight the Great War. Food was becoming expensive. Queues were long and many people were hungry and cold. Corruption blossomed so the rich feasted on delicacies while the poor starved.

International Women's Day (IWD), had been born in New York in 1909 to commemorate the 1908 strike of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The IWD idea was nourished from year to year, and by 1917 women in many countries had celebrated IWD including Russia, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and England. This had become a day each year to join together as working women. By 1917, 8th March was the accepted date for IWD.

What was 8th March in the West was 23rd February in Petrograd according to the locally used Julian calendar. Textile workers abandoned their machines in several large Petrograd factories and took to the streets. Before long the entire city had joined in and there was a mass strike. Ordered to fire on the women, soldiers mutinied. Large crowds joined the women in the streets.

The IWD strike by women workers in Petrograd triggered the 1917 February Revolution in Russia. Change was on its way. A new provisional government was installed and the Czar abdicated. In October of the same year a more thorough revolution brought hope of workers' control of the country. Over the coming years workers' control was gradually lost as the Bolsheviks descended into tyranny.

Today

Now on IWD 2017 we remember the hope and passion of those women who began the revolution in Petrograd. Women are still demanding liberty and autonomy, an end to tyranny, an end to war, and demanding secure employment, fair income and secure homes for all. We oppose the fat cats who gloat as their own coffers grow while many women, disabled people, the unemployed, migrants and refugees lose even more of their meagre income. The controllers of the state apparatus celebrate dirty coal and call it clean, supported by a fantastic rhetoric that contradicts the reality of our dire planetary situation.

The subjugation of women is the bedrock of their ugly power, dividing the working class by gender. Present day potentates deny women control over their own bodies, criminalise abortion, stigmatise single mothers, attack women's incomes, neglect their needs, protect violent partners. They hinder advancement of women in the workplace and silence their voices in the arts and in general discourse. They hope to confine women to their homes or to traditionally female jobs. With women silenced and subjugated, they expect to continue the work of oppression unopposed.

Just like in 1917, the first step towards victory is solidarity. Women of the world unite with each other and with all workers in struggle. How do we win? By going out on strike, by downing our tools and walking out on the corporations. By taking back what is ours: our dedication to our work, our intelligence and our ingenuity. We claim the profits of our labour and take control of our work. Although the workplace today may look different from what it was in 1917, the principles of worker control are the same. It doesn't matter whether workers are on a factory floor, in a telephone call centre. or home alone in a spare room in front of computer or sewing machine. All workers everywhere must unite to win their demands.

This time around, let's fight for workers' control from the start. Let's create structures with checks and balances that ensure workers keep control. Let us not hand over power to a state that can institute tyranny all over again. We want anarchist communist organisation. Workers' delegation. Equable procedures. Bottom up organisation.

It is 100 years since women workers began the 1917 revolution. Let's do it again! The time for global revolution is here!

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