

# THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION

While some might proclaim the end of patriarchy in Ireland – the reality could not be clearer to working women. The housing war waged on our communities traps Irish women in dangerous situations. The decaying health system north and south puts women on long waiting lists, too often only to be falsely told nothing is wrong. Rampant misogynistic violence means women must always be watching our backs, our drinks, our friends. Working women are treated as disposable. All despite being integral to the running of the capitalist system.

This IWWD the Free State holds a referendum to remove article 41 which enshrines that women's place and duty is in the home. Yet the replacement is little different and working women will continue to face the double domestic toil Connolly described a century ago. The reformists would tell us that this referendum is a "stepping stone" to better conditions, but women have always been beat over the head by "stepping stones". In the occupied six counties a female, "nationalist" first minister is also foretold to be a "stepping stone". But as Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khaled puts it *"The point is to de-politicize the question of women, and affirm that women can unite just as women"* – the occupation remains the primary enemy. O'Neill is quickly showing herself to be but another figurehead of British Rule.

In the 26 counties, following Repeal there are still little to no resources to access abortion and no intention of changing it. No doubt the blueshirts in Leinster House would be happy to see the Eight Amendment back in place. Every concession won tooth and nail from the system is undercut. Working women are again and again sold out by reformists. Chains are loosened only to be re-tightened. Similarly, abortion services are next to non-existent in the six counties, loyalist fascists refusing to commission them. Clearly neither Leinster House nor Stormont can deliver on even their most meagre promises.

Again and again, working women are asked to back more opportunists who offer the same old chains. Never on that agenda is taking back that

*"The struggle for women's liberation cannot be successful in isolation from the struggle to overthrow the imperialist system itself"*

– Anuradha Ghandy

power and overthrowing the imperialist system. But in the People's Wars around the world, more and more working women are doing just that. In the 21st century it is clear as Connolly said that the socialist cause has "no more earnest and whole-hearted supporters than the militant women" and that "none so fitted to break the chains".

The dominance of reformism in the Irish women's movement has made it a movement of the middle and upper classes. Working women are right to distrust this phony feminism. Women too still remain underrepresented in the Irish revolutionary movement, something that can only change by applying proletarian feminism and challenging patriarchal chauvinism everywhere. As has been seen in the People's Wars. Coni Ledesma of the National Democratic Front in the Philippines has said that *"It is only in participating in the revolution that women can work for their liberation"*. She also spoke of how "constant study, criticism and self criticism are tools that help overcome [patriarchal ideas]" in the movement and how "educational studies within the movement has made this easier for the women". Socialist republicans have always took inspiration from the most advanced revolutionaries around the globe. Today the Indian and Filipino revolutionaries pave the way forward.

Patriarchal violence is integral to the capitalist-imperialist system – revolution is the only solution. Reformist action cannot do any longer. Proletarian feminist Anuradha Ghandy saw that fascism was rising across the globe:



*"Imperialism faced with its worst ever crisis since the inter-war years is encouraging and promoting fundamentalist forces and fascist organisations and propaganda [...] they proclaim the specific agenda of restoring the centrality of the family and home in the life of women and patriarchal control over her sexuality"*.

Today's democratic rights are temporary. Both partitionist states are founded on reaction. The re-conquest of Ireland is integral to women's emancipation, both loyalism and free-staterism are firmly opposed to true progress. Direct action has shown to be the way forward for the working class, from the housing struggle to Palestinian solidarity to building resistance to the ongoing occupation of our six counties. To build a mass movement of working women, the same strategy must be taken up. Socialist republican community actions against spiking are one example. Housing, healthcare, public safety – only a militant, disciplined movement of working women can assert these rights and secure them through revolution.

**Beir Bua!**

**Ní Saoirse go Saoirse na mBan!**

# IWWD: A REVOLUTIONARY CELEBRATION

March 8<sup>th</sup> or International Working Women's Day (Lá Idirnáisiúnta na mBan atá ag Obair) represents a day of feminist struggle against gender oppression and the oppression of class society. Recently, the attempt is being made to dilute this revolutionary struggle down to a liberal understanding, that at best focuses on identity politics or "representation". The liberal appropriation of such a militant celebration is not surprising. Liberalism encourages separatism and jeopardises working class solidarity. Therefore, we must remind ourselves, that the majority of gender oppressed people are workers, furthermore, they are workers and peasants living in countries oppressed by imperialism and colonialism. The emancipation of gender oppressed people thus is synonymous with the emancipation of the proletariat and the crushing of imperialism. Representation is not equivalent to emancipation.

This article is a brief summary of the history of International Working Women's Day, thus, reconceptualising its significance as a revolutionary celebration.

## International history

In 1910, in response to the organising of American socialists and women in the struggle for the female vote. Clara Zetkin at the Second International Conference of Working Women brought forward the question of organizing an International Working Women's Day under the slogan "The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism". The fight for the female vote therefore became a strategic agitation tool in struggle for the full emancipation of women, which could not be achieved solely through gender struggle but

only through the proletarian class struggle against the bourgeoisie and the realisation of socialism.

The first international women's day was held on March 19<sup>th</sup> in 1911 as this day held historic importance for the German proletariat. On this day in 1848 following a 13-hour battle in Berlin, the Prussian king Frederick William, recognising the strength of the armed people, gave way before the threat of a proletarian uprising. Among the many promises he made, which he later failed to keep, was the introduction of votes for women.

In 1913 International Working Women's Day was transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, were it continued to raise the consciousness and organization of proletarian women. But the immediate success of this day, experienced a severe setback upon outbreak of the imperialist WWI. Many Socialist women throughout the imperialist countries attempted to turn March 8<sup>th</sup> into a demonstration of working women against the war. This attempt however was hampered by the opportunist factions leading the socialist parties of Europe.

Nevertheless, in 1917 on March 8<sup>th</sup> or February 23<sup>rd</sup> according to the Julian calendar, the power of organised proletarian women was realised and put on display. Faced with rapidly worsening conditions brought upon by the continuation of WWI and increased Tsarist repression the patience of Russian working and peasant women broke. They took to the streets of Petrograd demanding "Bread for our children" and "The return of our husbands from the trenches." These protests began what is now known as the February revolution. A revolution which resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II breaking the century long dynastic Romanov rule over Russia and paving the way for-

ward for the great October socialist revolution. To quote Alexandra Kollontai "The 1917 Working Women's Day has become memorable in history. On this day the Russian women raised the torch of proletarian revolution and set the world on fire. The February revolution marks its beginning from this day."

## Women and the Irish Struggle

In the context of Ireland, the vital role of women in raising and maintaining revolutionary consciousness is undeniable. This is evident throughout the history of the struggle, tracing back from; The Lady's Land League's struggle against Landlordism; the women who fought in the ranks of Irish Citizens Army in 1916; and the women of Cumann na mBan who in their great majority rejected the 1921 free state treaty and continued the fight for a 32 county socialist republic. In more contemporary stages of the struggle against British imperialism and occupation women who joined the IRA volunteers not only played a key role in furthering the republican struggle but also in developing their own republican feminisms.

Oppression of republican women by the British state often took gendered forms, including sexual violence, strip searches and the withholding of sanitary products for women held in prison. Actions like the dirty protest which for the women prisoners included smearing menstrual blood on their cell brought the topic of menstruation into the wider public. Their involvement in active service units further challenged the role of women in the home and family. In particular it laid bare the failings of liberal feminists of the time to combat republican women's gender oppression which was inexorably linked to their national oppression.

Considering the history of International Working Women's Day, as well as, our own history of revolutionary and feminist struggle, we must understand March 8<sup>th</sup> as a militant celebration. A celebration of women and gender oppressed revolutionaries and as a vehicle for furthering the revolutionary struggle.



# THE LION HEARTED WOMEN OF ERIN

On March 8th 1979 a picket was held outside Armagh Gaol. This picket, organised by Women Against Imperialism, was in solidarity with the women republican prisoners who were held within its walls. As the prison cells began to reverberate with the sound of chants, the prisoners managed to hang a sheet from their cell window that read: 'WE DEMAND POW STATUS'. Subject to beatings, strip searches, intimidation and harassment from the prison guards, the republican prisoners of Armagh Gaol had not found sympathy nor solidarity from many of the liberal middle class feminists of the period. Like any other resistance movement, the majority of republican activists were from working class backgrounds and knew that their freedom could not be found in the compromising liberal feminist movements which sought to compromise and discredit republicanism at every turn. IWWD should consistently reflect actions such as this at Armagh Gaol: resisting liberal feminism, commemorating gender oppressed revolutionaries from the past and carrying out socialist republican actions today.

Liberal, imperial feminism often labels the republican woman as 'fanatical', 'brainwashed' and as exposing herself to more gender oppression within a national liberation movement than they would within the yoke of imperialism. Paradoxically, this liberal argument removes the agency of these women in their decision to fight for Irish freedom. These women were republicans as a direct response to the oppression of imperialism, because even more so than their male comrades, they had so much more to gain from this

fight and so much more to lose and resist without it.

The history books can often remove the political agency of women, they were sweethearts, wives, daughters, mothers whose relationship to a man was what sustained them in a movement, not their own conviction, determination, and own desire to fight for freedom. In a documentary about the great martyr Mairéad Farrell, the presenter (a journalist who interviewed Farrell shortly before her murder) spends an hour labouring over the question as to why Farrell joined the ranks of the IRA and become one of its most efficient leaders. Despite hearing Farrell's clear and intentional words about her convictions as a republican, it goes unheard simply because many people don't want to believe that women, like any revolutionary, will give their life for an anti-imperialist cause without compromise.

All gender oppressed people of Ireland have suffered immensely under the oppression of the Free State, since its inception it has punished any deviation from conservative ideas around women's roles with its system of mass incarceration based on Catholic ideology and the capitalist necessity to make sure there is a bedrock of unpaid domestic labour to sustain its economy. The women of socialist republicanism, the majority of whom would fight on the anti-Treaty side after 1916, are not a history the Free State wants to preserve and communicate. Specifically because they do not want socialist republicanism to be seen as being at the forefront of gender struggle.

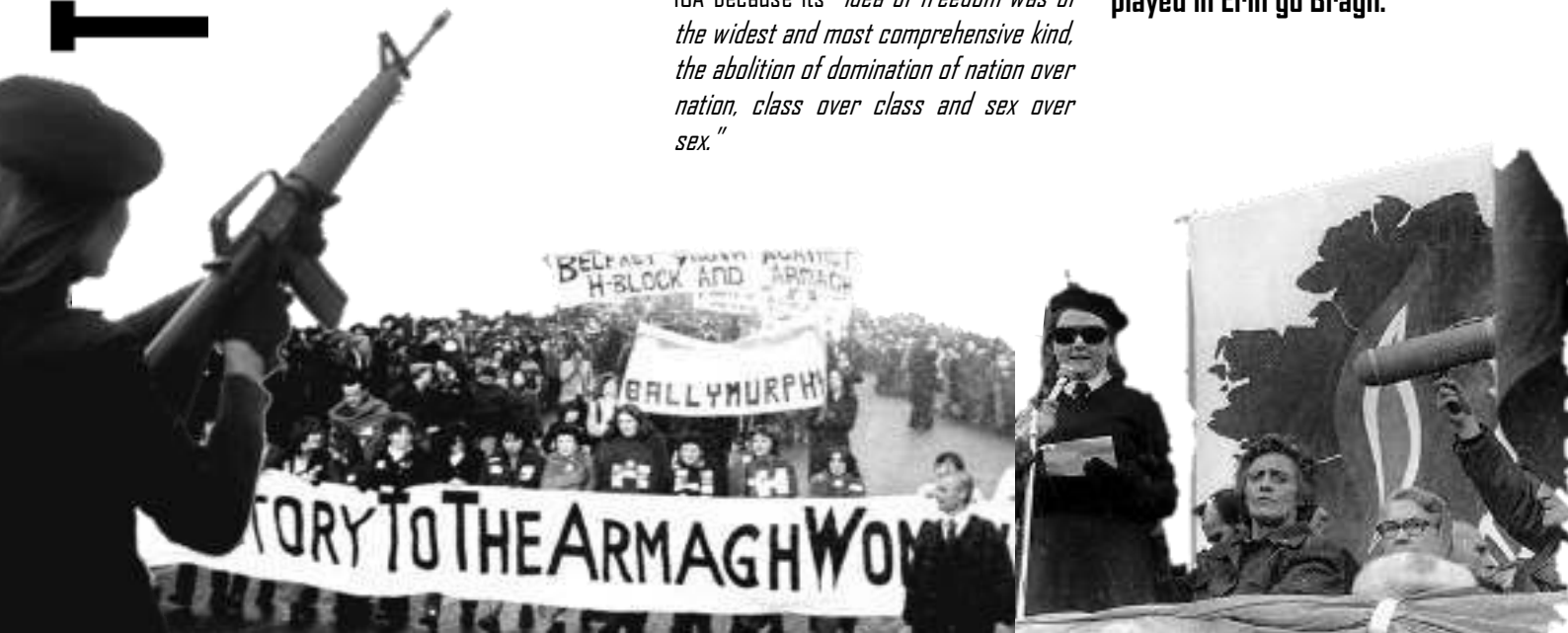
As Helena Moloney said, she joined the ICA because its *"idea of freedom was of the widest and most comprehensive kind, the abolition of domination of nation over nation, class over class and sex over sex."*

They became traitors to the partitionist Free State in order to secure a future that had been fought for in 1916. Although these revolutionaries knew they were fighting a conservative counter revolution for their freedom as Irish women, I am sure few of them knew the full horror of the misogynist institutions that would be formed alongside the inception of the Catholic Free State, inflicting decades of incarceration and harm against generations of women and girls.

From Anne Devlin to Mairéad Farrell, the history of socialist republican gender oppressed comrades can be seen throughout the history of our struggle and is being written as we speak.

To conclude, I want to mention an often missing verse from Erin go Bragh. Because to think about remembrance and commemoration, it is important to note how the women are left out of this emboldening form of remembrance: the tradition of rebel songs. Written by Peadar Kearney, I have only encountered this verse of the song in a recording of his sister, Kathleen Behan singing it. I am unsure whether this verse is the original, or if it was added by Kathleen Behan, but it symbolises once again the ongoing work of uncovering and emphasising a women's history in the republican movement:

**Here's a health to the men of the  
brave rank and file,  
And the Lion Hearted women of  
Erin's Green Isle,  
May the true men salute them  
with wonder and awe,  
For they played the best game  
played in Erin go Bragh.**



# SOCIALIST REPUBLICANISM AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

**'The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave.'**

**- James Connolly**

International Working Women's Day is a day to remember the part women have played and continue to play in class struggle. Working women are exploited both as workers and as women. Connolly saw that *"Marriage does not mean for her a rest from outside labour, it usually means that, to the outside labour, she has added the duty of a double domestic toil."* This remains true.

That division of labour - between conventional productive labour and reproductive labour (often known as unpaid domestic labour) - is enshrined within class society. Proletarian feminism understands private property to be the root of women's oppression. Before private property, historical evidence suggests that while the division of labour was still present it was not yet as exploitation or domination. Initially women were actually more often at the head of the home. Property passed through the matrilineal line or 'mother right'. Friedrich Engels argued:

*"The overthrow of the mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the house also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument of reproduction."*

Patriarchy became institutionalised. The family became one of private property with the enslavement of one sex by another. This was done as a way to determine inheritance.

Patriarchy serves as an ideological tool for the oppression of women. Naturalising violence and chauvinistic behaviours. The incorrect idea of a 'deficient female nature' is one way the exploiting ruling class attempts to prove women inferior. The thesis of 'Human nature' is also incorrect. Humans change depending on the historical epoch. Capitalism-imperialism, the current economic system. Its conception of women, then, has existed for as long as it has.

Women are either a part of the working class or the owning class. The working class are given a wage in exchange for their labour-power. The owning class appropriates this labour-power to create profits. The working class seek higher wages, the owning class seeks higher profits. This creates a contradiction which pits them against each other. Exploitation is needed to derive a profit for the ruling class. The worker can exist without a ruling class.

Feminism has historically often been detached from the class struggle. Legal reforms were an early form of feminism as they thought civil rights would produce the liberation of women. These reforms, within capitalist institutions, failed. Capitalism as a product of class society cannot reform itself to be non-oppressive towards women. Biological processes such as birth or periods are also cited to be the roots of our oppression. Our oppression came from how best to divide profits within a community. These

profits were not determined then by biological processes.

They were determined by private property and who was to inherit it. Purely external reasons are said to be the main factor such that women should be docile, nurturing, and loving. These traits seen by some feminists are innate female traits and should be fostered. Male traits are then the opposite; violence and aggression. This type of feminism often encourages separation of the sexes so that patriarchal attitudes don't exist. This ignores the economic causes for the birth of patriarchy, something that can not be undone by simply separation.

Liberation has been claimed by many different causes. The people then distrust such basic claims, however the only proven way of women's liberation has been to struggle against imperialism and to engage with class struggle.

With the correct political line we move forward, with the incorrect political line we fall back. Women have often been on the right side of the struggle. Cumman na mBan rejected the treaty. This was the start of the counter-revolution of the Republic proclaimed in 1916. In the split between the Official IRA, and the Provisional IRA it was CnaMb who chose the revolutionary road and sided with the provisionals. The Good Friday Surrender, CnaMb rejected it seeing it as liquidation of the revolution. When women organise into a revolutionary organ it is able to see the illusions that Imperialism offers us. Proletarian Feminism is the guide for all proletarian women to struggle against imperialism

## JOIN ANTI IMPERIALIST ACTION

AIA is a fighting Revolutionary Socialist Republican organisation formed in 2017 to rebuild the fight against imperialism.

Organised in all four Provinces, veteran and experienced Republicans are joining with new revolutionary youth to continue the struggle for National Liberation and Socialist Revolution until victory. You can play your part in this important work by becoming a member or active supporter of Anti Imperialist Action Ireland.

We are actively recruiting and building a network of Socialist Republicans across the country, Revolutionaries who owe their allegiance to the Working Class and the People's Republic proclaimed in 1916 alone and oppose imperialism and colonialism worldwide.

**Help us rebuild the Revolutionary Movement by joining the Resistance!**



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