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Women's movement

From the individual "me too" to the collective "us too" Me Too: A movement for women workers too!

- Features - Feminism -

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It has been more than two years since the emergence of the Me Too movement that unveiled the enormous extent of sexual harassment in the workplace and gender-based sexual violence around the world! Not at all ephemeral, this movement does not stop surprising us. Not only does it persist and now extends to all continents, but it also evolves from a virtual phenomenon on the Internet to a real social movement of the 21st century. And above all, it becomes the banner of workers provoking victorious mobilizations of historical dimensions against two gigantic multinationals of the most merciless capitalism...

When Pandora's box opened....

It all started in the United States in October 2017, with the sexual harassment scandal starring the great Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, and after actress Alyssa Milano circulated a tweet that she had named Me Too. The content was simple: "If you are sexually harassed, write Me Too as an answer to this tweet". That is, "me too".

In just 24 hours, 12 million people around the world, the overwhelming majority of them women, reported cases of sexual harassment by powerful men.

In a new way and through millions of testimonies, the Me Too movement, which uses the technological tools of our time, has revealed a hidden, tragic and mass global reality. It caused a shock by exposing the enormous dimensions of the phenomenon of sexual assault.

It is a fact that Me Too became very visible and attracted public attention only when several Hollywood celebrities dared to speak in public. However, everything that has been said about Me Too starting out thanks only to celebrities and that it only concerns them is historically false.

Contrary to what we may think, Me Too was not born in 2017, but existed long before. The movement was born eleven years ago in New York City on the initiative of Tarana Burke, an African-American activist born in the poor neighbourhood of Harlem.

Burke defines herself as a "survivor" of a sexual assault. The Me Too movement, she tells us, creates a process of solidarity between those who have "survived", who can thus open their hearts and talk about things that are usually unspeakable so that women listen to each other. This helps to overcome guilt, victimization and loneliness.

Indeed, Tarana Burke had proposed Me Too as a means of liberation so that the "survivors" would accept themselves and go beyond their deep psychological trauma, they would awaken their will to do something and to fight. Their credo is: "To be strengthened through mutual understanding". In a video, she explained: "I spent a lot of time when I was twenty years old, looking for ways to heal. I had talked to friends, to my community, but where I found a real understanding was with people who had had the same experiences. Survivors" are the only ones who can include other "survivors".

The Me Too movement has brought something totally new to the struggle of feminist movements: Through the Internet it has created a global space of self-awareness, something that we feminists of the 1970s succeeded in doing by creating small groups then called "consciousness-raising groups". But these only worked on too small a scale.

Me Too's unique achievement is that its audience is first and foremost those who have suffered sexual violence. At the same time, it creates an important dynamic because by eliminating the feeling of pain, shame, loneliness, isolation, it creates the conditions to create a collective feminist consciousness, self-knowledge and direct action against gender-based violence and misogyny!

And the wall of silence broke!

But why did the Me Too movement only grow in the fall of 2017 and not when it was launched by Tarana Burke in 2007? Quite simply, because it was at that time that the American feminist movement was soaring because there had previously been the great Women's March against the inauguration into the presidency of the United States of the very sexist Donald Trump, who is attacking the rights won by the feminist movement.

This was the largest demonstration in the history of the United States, bringing together a multitude of social movements and succeeding in enormously strengthening the entire North American feminist movement. Subsequently, feminist mobilizations continued on March 8, 2017 with something completely new, the great international women's strike. So it was in such a climate that women felt stronger to go even further...

Moreover, it is not at all surprising that it was the "survivors" Hollywood celebrities and other "exceptional women" who were able to burst the abscess. There are some who attack these "exceptional women" who unfairly describe them as careerists, hypocrites, famous and rich women, belonging to the court of the great bourgeois and neoliberal Hillary Clinton because they flaunt themselves and remain in the public eye.

For us, the explanation is quite different. We believe that these "exceptional" women have punctured the abscess of a weak link. They work in the heart of the filthy beast, in the heart of a space where they are in contact with all-powerful predatory males of the world's elite of the "upper class", where violence and harassment are frequent! And there is worse: In this environment of those above, sexual harassment is not only accepted, but it constitutes an almost imposed "value", a "must" totally unpunished. Why? Exactly because it symbolizes the prestige and strength of the male succeeds at the peak of his power, who gets a thrill by imposing absolute domination on the body and the life of his "subjects".

The wall of silence is breaking down, but....

"Yes", some say, "but denunciations of sexual violence are limited to denouncing a few people, targeting isolated individuals and therefore only concern individual cases". And the worst part, they say, "is that they are above the law, and therefore they are very dangerous because they can lead to self-righteousness, revenge and lynching".

However, the Me Too movement was born precisely against the hypocritical silence of society, which systematically tolerates these crimes since its fundamental institutions such as the police, justice and the family close their eyes or prefer to look the other way. In short, it is true that feminists should not limit their struggle to denouncing a few predatory males, even if their condemnation is not insignificant at all.

Sexual harassment at work as well as gender violence have deep roots in patriarchal society and are so closely linked to social inequalities of all kinds that they require a collective response...against the isolation produced by gender violence.

Moreover, the Me Too movement has triggered demonstrations of collective resistance from the very beginning, and this in real social life. This is because the taboo of hypocritical tolerance cannot be broken by protesting on the Internet. Because this Me Too movement is not just a virtual reality, as some say, since it produces a public social dialogue, encourages legal action and has an educational function. That is, it develops feminist consciousness.

And also, in its name, groups and networks are being created throughout the world, Me Too, in the United States is able to influence even trade unions, while encouraging new analyses which are in fact very much on the rise, that explore forms of gender violence, the Me Too movement among working women:

Historic mobilizations at McDonald's and Google!

In September 2018, thousands of very poor women workers in the McDonald's multinational fast food chain, mostly African-American and Latinas, crossed their arms and took to the streets in ten North American states demanding that employers stop their hypocritical silence and stop covering up the sexual assaults suffered by their workers from their superiors, managers or even customers in their stores!

This was a historic international event as the Me Too movement turned against the world's second largest employer, which is also the boss of one of the worst workaholics, McDonald's fast food restaurants. Indeed, 42% of its workers, especially women, suffer systematic daily sexual harassment in the more than 14,000 McDonald's restaurants around the world, because gender-based violence is a weapon used by employers to subjugate women workers.

Obviously, it is no coincidence that the mobilizations at McDonald's have benefited from the full support of one of the largest and most combative independent workers' movements in the United States, the Fight for \$15, which has been fighting for the past 6-7 years to raise the minimum hourly wage from \$7.3 to \$15. This is how this radical workers' movement did everything possible to support the Me Too movement from the beginning, and it is no coincidence that the demonstrators' banners were signed jointly by Fight for \$15 and Me Too! [\[1\]](#)

But there has been more than this historic mobilization at the world's largest fast-food chain: In early November 2018, thousands of Google's high-tech employees, about 20,000, went on strike to protest Google's hypocritical treatment of several cases of sexual harassment by its executives, such as the infamous Andy Rubin, the inventor of the Android phone. Not only did the company defend him, but it also gave him a \$90 million "gift" when he left Google...as if nothing had happened!

Leading the way, the employees closed Google's workplaces and took to the streets from Tokyo to New York and Los Angeles and from London and Dublin to Zurich and Berlin. And this strike made history, having been not only one of the largest but also one of the most unusual work stoppages of the contemporary labour movement. And it has undoubtedly been the largest employee mobilization in the history of high-tech industry...

The conclusion is obvious: Me Too and the movement behind it are not made by the rich and famous... for the rich and famous. It is for the overwhelming majority of women and, above all, for those below and working women, that is, for those who are primarily in the line of fire of all the injustices and oppressions of capitalist and patriarchal society. And as the examples of McDonald's and Google's historical - and victorious - mobilizations concretely demonstrate, the Me Too movement must and can become a real locomotive that overcomes sexist and anti-worker obstacles, breaks down employer barriers, unites the working class and those below, while at the same time developing solidarity, equality and consciousness!

The Me Too movement teaches us many things. It is up to us to take advantage of it and take action!

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[1] See the [video](#).