



Toward the construction of a  
socialist program for women's liberation:  
**Notes from the  
female reality in Mexico**



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Authors: **Leda Silva Victoria and Angélica García Olivares**

Contributors: Alejandra Rivera and Genoveva Ramírez

**Leaders of the Partido Obrero Socialista of Mexico  
(Socialist Workers Party)**

Reprinted by: **Radical Women**  
New Valencia Hall, 625 Larkin St. #202, San Francisco, CA 94109  
Phone 415-864-1278 ♦ Fax 415-864-0778  
RadicalWomenUS@gmail.com ♦ [www.RadicalWomen.org](http://www.RadicalWomen.org)

Translated from Spanish by Amy Gray, Monika Goforth,  
Marit Knutson, Laura Mannen, Eduardo Zapata Martínez,  
and David Tucker.

# I. The situation of women in Mexico

For revolutionary organizations like ours, it is fundamental to have an analysis of the reality of working women that allows us to articulate a program and conduct an effective intervention in the movements that women participate in.

We need not only to push these movements to working class victory, but also to ensure that many of these women comrades be part of our partisan militancy, because it is only via the revolutionary party and the socialist revolution that we will achieve true emancipation for women.

Lenin, in conversations with Clara Zetkin, commented: *"We as yet do not have an international communist women's movement, and we should pursue one at all costs. We should undertake its immediate creation. Without this movement, the work of our International and its parties is not complete and can never be so, and our revolutionary work must be complete."*

Given that all women of the world share oppressive conditions

that are reflected in everyday inequalities; it is also true that there are significant ethnic, religious, educational and social differences. For Marxists, the most important determining factor is what class

one belongs to: the exploited class or the exploiting class.

Starting from this material base, we can determine the social and cultural relationships of a person. So, this condition, the social class, will mark significantly the extent of oppression<sup>1</sup> a woman will suffer. That is to say, not all women are equally oppressed; working class women will suffer oppression with more severity, and this will be taken advantage of by the bourgeoisie to super-exploit them.

A socialist program, which seeks to strip the bourgeoisie of power and install a dictatorship of the proletariat, must include the fight of working class women, who are half of the world. So, a government of the workers cannot be truly revolutionary and cannot emancipate humanity if it does not



take women workers into account. Therefore it is vital that we develop this program, but always taking into consideration the circumstances in which women live.

The goal of this document is to address an array of issues that allow for a wide view of the problems that affect Mexican women. We undertake themes such as health, migration, violence and sexual exploitation, poverty and employment, in all of which we identify a great inequality. We also point to some sectors where women are mobilizing to defend their rights.

<sup>1</sup>We identify oppression not only by economic categories, but also with cultural, ideological and psychological categories. And we define it as the taking advantage of inequalities in order to put a social group at a disadvantage and subordinate it on the basis of racial, sexual, national or other differences, which produces a situation of unequal rights and of social, cultural and eventually economic discrimination.



# The feminization of poverty

Although Mexico doesn't share the same levels of poverty found among large numbers of workers in Latin America, what's certain is that our economy has deteriorated in the last few years. This has impacted the quality of life of the Mexican proletariat. Once again, the ones most affected by this situation are women.

According to the *Colegio de México*, in the year 2000, 24 million Mexican women and men suffered poor nutrition, 31 million were under or unemployed, and 53 million had inadequate retirement savings.

Poverty is different for men and women in Mexico; in the case of women, there are eight million more women than men who work without healthcare or a pension.

The inequality of opportunity that is still prevalent in our society explains why women are more affected by poverty. In addition to having lower access to education, the reality is that women's work is less valued than men's, even though they carry out the same activities, and the results are the same. *"In urban zones, women earn an average income equivalent to only two times the poverty line (the minimum that an individual needs to survive) while men earn an average almost four times the monthly poverty line."*<sup>1</sup>

In Mexico, 7.6 percent of women over 15 years old are illiterate, in

comparison to 4.8 of men. Illiteracy is concentrated in women who are older, indigenous, and live in rural zones, which limits the possibility to overcome their socioeconomic conditions.

To explain the conditions of poverty, one must also look at the situation of domestic labor, which is not recognized as work and goes unpaid. Mexican women have to divide their working day between working in the home and doing paid labor because this is the only guarantee for the survival of the family; even when they have a partner or other family member that contributes economically. This situation is accentuated in rural communities, where on top of working in the home and raising children, women collaborate in community activities and manual production activities (embroidery, weaving, handicrafts) that are considered recreational though they serve to generate small incomes. Women also work in the fields, so their work day often starts before sunrise and ends when the family has gone to bed.

This work rhythm worsens the quality of life and health of women who already work long days (in and out of the house, depending on the case), without weekends or holidays. This is why the possibility for women to overcome poverty is minimal. For those that work in the home, a lack of access to economic

resources impedes their ability to attain medical services when they need them, or to buy medication, or to have any retirement savings for a peaceful old age. Moreover, this situation exposes women to economic and emotional violence because men that exercise violence also tend to use money to control the relationship.

The precarious situation for women relegated to “the home” worsens with the fact that domestic labor in our country is not recognized socially. It is considered that women who are committed exclusively to domestic work simply do not work.

The conditions that we have addressed have intensified since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has particularly affected women. Due to the implementation of this act, women’s migration to the United States has increased.<sup>2</sup>

This is the case because there are fewer and fewer options for women living in poverty to deal with their economic situation. Currently, many women from rural communities find that to solve a desperate situation, the

options are migration, the sex industry, or drug trafficking.<sup>3</sup> In Mexican jails it is common to find women who committed “crimes of poverty.” They were used to transport drugs or to sell small quantities, activities which come at great risk.



Sources:

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# Increasing labor's "flexibility" affects mostly women

In Mexico, as in the great majority of Latin American countries, women are considered second class citizens. This is intensified in the proletariat. The concept of a natural division of labor still exists. The traditional role assigned to women is still in the home, which is seen as their natural place. In reality though, this situation has been forced to change because of the economic conditions in the country.

The increase of women entering the work force results in a contradiction because the conditions of oppression have not disappeared. To make matters worse, we have become the material for corporate exploitation.

Oppression manifests itself as well in the fact that women do not have the same opportunities as men in the workplace. We often earn less for the same work. Nevertheless, women's integration into the labor force has permitted

them to gain some independence by earning a wage. This also makes them begin to question the supposed "natural division of labor." By the same token, it has permitted women to acquire class consciousness, especially when their labor rights are being violated and they are forced to defend them.

Nonetheless, the governments onslaught on labor rights has intensified. The PAN (National Action Party) controlled government, with support from their partners in crime in the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) and the PRI (Party of the



Institutional Revolution), wants to destroy Mexican labor laws so they can offer cheap labor with zero rights to the huge national and international capitalists.

One of the principal attacks by the government was reforming the public employees retirement and benefits system through changes to the so called “law of the ISSSTE” (the Institute of Security and Social Services of State Workers, or ISSSTE by its acronym in Spanish, is the government agency that provides healthcare, pensions, and other social service benefits to Mexico’s public employees). Among the changes the government introduced were increasing the retirement age and the privatization of members’ retirement funds. There is also the increased danger of losing more and more rights, including childbirth coverage and maternity leave. According to specialists, the reforms to the “law of the ISSSTE” impact female enrollees in larger proportions. Women represent 54% of affected workers. That is to say over 1.4 million workers, which include medical, technical, education, administrative and professional personnel, out of a total of 2.6 million members.<sup>1</sup>

This is just one of the consequences of increasing labor’s “flexibility” within the context of NAFTA’s implementation. It implies hourly wages and contracts with fewer benefits (so-called “flexible benefits”). And so far it has permitted corporations to access a labor force at their beck

and call. The Mexican government argues that this will increase worker productivity. And how could it not? To earn enough to survive everyone will have to work much longer hours than federal labor law ever considered.

Women workers are especially affected by these reforms. In addition to the gender inequalities described in this document regarding salaries, access to jobs and domestic work, there is the loss of labor rights. Companies will no longer be required to pay maternity leave nor provide time off to breastfeed nor provide daycare. This situation will worsen the already precarious economic situation of millions of Mexican women.

Another one of the impacts of the so-called “flexible labor” already being felt by female workers is the increasing number of women entering the informal work sector. This work does not provide a stable income, and women workers are faced with a lack of health benefits and social services. In the majority of cases this means children have no healthcare or social services, because they rely on their mothers’ labor power for survival.

The National Population Council (CONAPO, by its acronym in Spanish) reports that from 2000 to 2006 the number of women entering the workforce increased. The nonprofit organization Center of Labor Reflection and Action (CEREAL, by its acronym in Spanish) states that during the six-year Fox Administration, 50% of

jobs created were of poor quality. They came without health benefits or pension plans, and the wages were low. These jobs were mostly filled by women.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, six million women work without any kind of benefits. Among the most common jobs are preparation and sale of food, catalog order sales and informal vending in the streets.

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# Health, abortion and maternity



Access to health services is a human being's fundamental right. Nevertheless, for Mexican women this remains a simple declarative statement, not reality, because healthcare has become a luxury. There are fewer and fewer jobs that offer socialized health benefits, and consequently, free healthcare services for workers. Besides, the Mexican public health system has serious deficiencies as a result of bad management and repeated attempts by the government to privatize it.

This adds to the fact that a history of systemic oppression negatively impacts the health of women. It restricts fundamental rights like making decisions about our own bodies, which further exposes us to the risks associated

with exercising sexuality. An example of this is abortion, an area which has seen important advances as a result of the struggle by entire generations of Mexican feminists.

Last year, the Mexico City government approved the decriminalization of abortion before twelve weeks of gestation. This allowed the city's public hospitals to provide free

abortion services. As mentioned, this reform is the result of years of struggle and not just the will of the political party in power in the Federal District. This reform benefits poor women, those who don't have the resources to access abortion services under safe and hygienic conditions.

Nevertheless, the fight for decriminalization still has many roads to cross. In 2002, the non-profit organization Ipas<sup>1</sup> reported that in Latin America 3.7 million abortions were carried out annually under risky conditions, the highest index in the world. This is reflected in maternal death rates, 21 % of which are attributable to abortion malpractice. In Mexico the rate of induced abortions is 21 for every 100 births.<sup>2</sup>The CONAPO

estimates that 533,100 abortion procedures are conducted annually in our country. We want to point out this is only an estimate. Due to the criminalized status of abortion in the overwhelming majority of the country, exact numbers don't exist on the matter.

In the face of this, state governments have set their sight on imposing restrictive policies only. These measures have further criminalized abortion and failed at preventing it. Yet, they have increased complications that range from infections, hemorrhages, cervical laceration, uterine perforations and intra-abdominal lesions up to death.

This problem has also become a social justice issue, given that those who resort to risky procedures are women that belong to less favored socioeconomic layers. Many of the clandestine methods used to end pregnancy put women's lives and health at higher risk. But, penalization, the high costs of clandestine surgical procedures, and the social stigma for women who decide to end their pregnancies force the poorest women to run the risk of death.

The problem of abortion-related maternal death is also a result of the capitalist, patriarchal system in which women's health and welfare is a secondary issue. This is especially true when speaking of women workers, who are considered disposable products that can be squeezed dry under this system. The Department of Health reported that in Mexico,

during 2007, 55.8 maternal deaths were registered for every 100,000 live births. Nevertheless, behind the numbers we again encounter the issue of social justice and the evidence of inequality. In the country's poorest states, such as Oaxaca, the levels of maternal death rise up to five times higher than in richer states.

The issue of abortion-related maternal death is linked also with that of access to and use of contraceptive methods. Although information about this subject is abundant, not all women have access to contraception. And in the case of very poor women they have access to neither information nor methods of contraception.

The cultural norms under which we are educated as women and men are also an obstacle to prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unplanned pregnancies. In countries like ours, it is still frowned upon when a woman demands her partner use a condom. And among the majority of women there exists a passive attitude toward prevention when it comes to their own healthcare. Meanwhile, men object to using condoms, arguing that sensibility and spontaneity is lost. In addition, the idea prevails that prevention is necessary only with women who are dedicated to sex work or are promiscuous.

This education, which is a pillar of systemic oppression of women, has grave consequences. In our country, the risk of HIV infection for women is on the rise,

especially for housewives and women in stable relationships.

It is estimated that 42 thousand women live with HIV/AIDS in Mexico. These are only estimates because due to the stigmatization of the disease and those carrying it, it's difficult to take an accurate measuring of the levels of infection. To further complicate the matter, there is a shortage of detection kits, and health care workers are seldom trained in epidemiology reporting. Of this estimate, 60% of those affected are women in lower socioeconomic levels. This notably reduces their ability to manage their infections favorably.<sup>3</sup>

Feminist organizations indicate that migrant and indigenous women encounter four times more exposure to HIV/AIDS.<sup>4</sup> Women who are migrant workers are treated like disposable beings by their coyotes, delinquent gangs, the police and even other migrants. This exposes them not only to sexual violence, but also to infection, pregnancies, physical harm and even death.

On the road to the United States, some migrant women stay in border cities, where they find that sex work is one of the few options for survival. In this activity they are further exposed to addictions, sexual violence and of course STDs and HIV/AIDS.

Sources:

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4. National Public Health Institute. [Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública.]

## Female migration: abuses and violation of rights



The extreme poverty under which the majority of the world's population exists has forced many people to migrate from their home countries to first world nations in hopes of finding better living conditions. In Mexico and Central America, immigration is mostly to the United States of America.

Immigration is another phenomenon that specifically impacts poor women in Latin America. Particularly hard hit are women from Central America and the more impoverished areas of our country. This is why over 50 percent of the people who pass through Mexican territory to attempt to enter the United States are women. A study conducted by CONAPO estimates that 23 percent of Mexican immigrants between the ages of 12 and 20 are women.

Eighty percent of Mexican

women who immigrate to the United States are victims of rape, or are required to "pay sexually" their coyotes or human traffickers.<sup>1</sup> Central American women live under even graver conditions than our compatriots who cross the border into the United States. Along the border between Mexico and Guatemala, more than two

thousand women have died; the majority while attempting to cross the border into Mexico. There are also well known cases of Mexican military personnel who have raped Central American women.

The Mexican government's policies regarding immigration do not differ much from those of the U.S. government. Both criminalize immigration into their countries and try to stop the flow of humans over their borders. The United States is doing this by building a border wall, and the Mexican government is doing it by destroying the train tracks that Central Americans use to cross into Mexico. These measures, rather than solving the problem, only intensify the potential abuses to immigrants.

Among the primary reasons why the rights of immigrants are

so often violated, particularly those of immigrant women within Mexico, include widespread corruption within the police force, the impunity with which delinquent and trafficking groups operate, and the cultural norms associated with machismo. All of these factors combine with the fact that undocumented immigrants have no access to basic legal protections under Mexican law. In regard to Mexican women who migrate within the country, laws exist to protect them and to promote gender equity; however, in practice these laws become meaningless because those charged to enforce them either deny their existence or dismiss them as irrelevant.



Source:  
1. Eliana  
Cárdenas Méndez,  
*Migration, globalization and femicide in Mexico* (IX Neo-critical Colloquium, University of Quintana Roo).

[**Migración, globalización y femicidios en México**, Eliana Cárdenas Méndez, IX Coloquio de Neocrítica, Universidad de Quintana Roo.]



# Sexual exploitation and human trafficking

The concept of women's bodies as currency and as objects offered to whoever decides to use them is the basis for Mexico's third highest source of illicit revenue. Following the lucrative trafficking of drugs and arms comes the traffic in human beings, including the sexual exploitation of girls, boys, and women. Those involved in human trafficking include family members of minor children who decide to sell them to organized crime rings, tourists who come to our country knowing that they can access any kind of sexual service they desire, and high ranking public officials who collude with organized crime for their own financial benefit. Given the high demand for these types of sexual services, organized groups also collude with police and public officials to kidnap children and women and force them into prostitution.

In our country, it is difficult to know how many women are engaged in sex work because Mexican society stigmatizes these women. They are isolated, judged, and condemned. Therefore, they have become an "invisible" population that has no official identification. The majority of these women live in hotels with their children, or on the streets. They have no access to social services or health coverage, and, of course, they have no labor rights. Given that denouncing any

case of violence against women is difficult to begin with, for sex workers it is impossible. Society and the authorities view participation in sex work as justification of any and all violence that befalls sex workers. Thus, when one of these women is murdered, no one is surprised because according to societal norms "when all is said and done, she was asking for it."

When we speak of prostitution, generally we only refer to the exchange of sexual activity for money, without considering that this is a social phenomenon that impacts a significant number of women. The clandestine nature of sex work exposes women to a multitude of risks. For example, in the *La Merced* zone in Mexico City, women usually charge between 20 and 50 pesos (2 to 5 U.S. dollars) for 20 minutes of sexual activity. Clients will commonly offer sex workers a little more money if they don't have to use a condom. Many women accept this condition in order to increase their income and possibly afford a hotel room for the night rather than sleeping on the street.

Many women resort to sex work because they have no other employment options. These are usually women who have low levels of education and no vocational training skills. As mentioned earlier, many of these women lack even legal documentation. None-

theless, a significant percentage of women who engage in sex work are forced to do so.

According to UN statistics, 245 million people are victims of human trafficking worldwide. In Latin America and the Caribbean alone, five million people are victims of this activity. According to the Coalition against Trafficking of Women and Girls, there are 21 thousand Central American women in Mexico who are forced to prostitute themselves in 1,552 bars in the city of Tapachula, Chiapas (a city on the Mexico-Guatemala border through which Central Americans must pass when crossing into Mexico). The same organization indicates that many women in Central America and in rural areas of Mexico are lured into sexual servitude through promises of work in *maquilas* or in wealthy homes, or they are simply lured by the promise that they will travel and see other cities. In other cases, they are simply kidnapped and submitted to multiple humiliations before coming to their final destination, which may be sex work under slave conditions or organ trafficking.

Children, both girls and boys, are also victims of this situation. According to statistics provided by the Mexican Ministry of Health, in our country there are 16,000 children sexually exploited; five thousand of whom can be found in Mexico City. Nonetheless, the same ministry also recognizes that these statistics are only partial, given the clandestine nature

of the activity and the protection offered to abusers through police and government channels. Therefore, the real figures could easily be double. Why is nothing done to stop this situation? Simply put, this is an activity that generates around 20 billion U.S. dollars annually worldwide.

What lies behind these crimes? Extreme poverty, lack of employment opportunities, salaries below the rate of inflation, and violence all contribute; but, above all, the historical oppression of women and their children makes them the most vulnerable members of society.



# Violence and femicide

As in every country in Latin America, violence towards women is a phenomenon that is thriving. It takes on more and more atrocious forms, as in the case of the femicide in Ciudad Juárez. And in spite of the establishment of laws, formation of special investigations and political dialogues, the violence continues. After all, these approaches have not attacked the root causes of these terrible crimes. The violence that we refer to is that which the exploitive State has imposed on women, principally workers. Such violence, a violation of human rights, allows the bourgeoisie to exploit women, not only their labor power, but also their physical bodies.

In Mexico, the last national poll about violence<sup>1</sup> revealed that 25.8% of women reported living through at least one incident of violence in their lives; in 74% of cases, the aggressor was their partner. Of the women that participated in the study, 21.55% reported suffering violence in the past year, inflicted by the partner.

These studies are the result of years of struggle by feminist groups to make violence visible as a social/public problem, and not a private matter, pressing the government to create laws to respond to the violence. The "Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence" law has been approved, which recognizes economic and psychological violence. It also recognizes that this phenomenon can exist in the public

and private spheres.

Although the passage of this law is advancement, it faces great barriers. In the majority of cases the consequence of these barriers is that the law is not enforced. The lack of coordination and collaboration between those charged with implementation, the lack of resources, the lack of personnel training, etc.; all impact those suffering violence in any sphere. Unfortunately, as long as the cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women are not modified, the violence will not disappear. It doesn't matter how many laws and treaties are passed. These social norms will remain as long as the capitalist system lives. There are privileges derived from the conditions of oppression that women live under.

Amnesty International<sup>2</sup> reports not only on the gravity of the violence toward women in our country, but on the role the government has had in the face of this problem:

"There are few of these cases of violence against women that are reported, and even fewer that conclude with restitution for the victims or prosecution and sentencing for the perpetrators. The biggest documented case of violence against women in Mexico is the murder of over 430 women and girls during the last 15 years. Additionally, more than 30 remain missing in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua City, both in the state



of Chihuahua. Many of the murdered women were victims of kidnapping and sexual violence. However, a significant proportion of them were also victims of domestic violence.”

“A common thread between many of these crimes – among those found killed for sexual motives, physical and psychological domestic abuses lasting years, and presumed kidnappings – is that the authorities did not use adequate methods of prevention and punishment. In 2005 in Ciudad Juarez, federal investigators identified 177 local officials as having performed negligently in investigations into the murder of almost 300 women over a period of 10 years. Practically none of those implicated have faced charges. In San Salvador Atenco, members of the public security force of the State of Mexico tortured and sexually as-

saulted at least 26 women detained May 3-4, 2006. Although investigations were conducted at the federal and state level, to date only six agents have been accused, all of minor crimes.”

Femicide in Mexico has increased dangerously in the last 15 years, and is closely tied to discrimination, exclusion, oppression, and exploitation. Between 1999 and 2005, more than 6,000 girls and women have been killed in the whole country. The states that have

the highest incidence of femicide are Mexico, Veracruz, Chiapas, Guerrero and Chihuahua.

The most famous case on the international level is that of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. In the cases of the more than 400 women who have been killed, their bodies have been found in the desert with obvious signs of torture and rape. Most are young, dark skinned, with long hair, but mostly, they are factory workers, housekeeping workers and immigrants.

Other facts these cases have in common include the direct participation of organized crime and the government in the killings. It is becoming increasingly evident that the killers are part of the ruling class: business leaders, police, government officials and drug dealers. This alliance is what has allowed impunity to these decayed

sectors of the dominant class. They feel they have the right not only to exploit the labor power of women, but also to abuse their bodies like throwaway goods.

Femicide in Ciudad Juarez occurs within a framework where the maquiladora industry plays a huge role in the social and economic context of the region. This industry is characterized by the employment of mainly women (who are considered super-cheap labor) with no labor rights. This strengthens the ideology that working women are second class citizens, docile, delicate and dependent, making them into a vulnerable sector compared to the patriarchal power that feels it has the right to abuse women.

It's inside the factories where it is believed that women have been selected to be murdered; however, in spite of this strong suspicion, the government has not dared to investigate this industry.

The sheer barbarism that the capitalist State drags us into is clear in Ciudad Juárez. Where men and women workers are turned into wage slaves, where violence is committed with total impunity, and where the government and organized crime are one and the same.

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## II. Women are mobilizing

For this second part it is necessary to recognize that our organization is just now initiating this characterization; hence the analysis covered here will be limited and will require further depth of study.

Nevertheless, given our political experience, we can at this moment point to some mobilized sectors in which women play a prominent role. These include the teachers unions, the Zapatista movement, and the fight by mothers of femicide victims in Ciudad Juárez.

### **Teachers unions: A movement with an eminent female presence**

Education is one of the areas of labor in which women participate more than men. It is thought that in basic education, 80% of positions are occupied by women. This is not reflected, however, in administration positions, since these are taken mainly by men.<sup>1</sup>

But it has been observed that women have significantly incorporated themselves into the labor struggle as well as the social justice movements. However, their participation in these struggles has not been duly recognized because the patriarchal system has fomented the idea that men have power over women in addition to considering them submissive and obedient.

Despite this situation, women *are* making headway in the sphere of labor unions. For example, the

National Coordinating Union of Education Workers mobilized massively in 1989 for wage increases and union democracy. This favored the many female teachers who, having been elected as representatives for schools sites, school districts, statewide union locals and to the collective leadership of the Democratic Movement of Education Workers, gained a majority both as rank-and-file union participants and representation in leadership positions.

In the Oaxaca insurrection, where the teachers union was the vanguard, women also played a very important role. For example, it was women who took the initiative to expropriate the radio and television stations for use by the movement. After that decisive-



ness, the August 1<sup>st</sup> Women's Coordinating Committee was formed. Together with many other women, the committee began to demand greater representation in the leadership of the movement. After all, women took a very active role in the organization of barricades, encampments, commissions, brigades, marches and sit-ins that occurred during the movement.

Presently, the teachers unions are once again confronted with a pounding by the government. In cahoots with the biggest labor skate in the teachers union, Elba Esther Gordillo, the government has imposed the despised Alliance for Quality Education (ACE, by its acronym in Spanish). The ACE strongly attacks the rights of teachers while advancing the privatization of education. This government attack has given union locals from different states, several of which have not mobilized in years, the impetus for a growing fight against the ACE.

In this movement, it is evident that the majority of rank-and-filers are women. Our organization has resolved to in-

tervene with force in this fight. However, it will require us to consider a policy that is not just focused on organized labor, but is also oriented specifically toward female teachers.

### **Women workers are also on the move**

As we mentioned in the first part of the document, in the maquila industry there is a significant percentage of female workers who are super-exploited. This has generated movements formed by women in defense of their labor rights. In the last few years some of these struggles have been: at the Sara Lee plant, located in the state of Coahuila, where female workers managed to form an independent union; and the *Vaqueros Navarra* maquiladora, in Tehuacán,



Puebla, where the workers have been fighting for their freedom to be unionized.

Still, it is necessary to recognize that at the moment there is a lack of energy in labor organizing within the maquila industry. But as a revolutionary and proletarian organization we must be alert to the emergence of these struggles. We believe they will be more constant due to the increasingly precarious situation in which women workers live.

### **Zapatistas: women's revolutionary law**

Women were a fundamental part in the formation of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN, by its acronym in Spanish). When the EZLN was publicly launched in 1994, 30% of its constituents were women.<sup>2</sup>

The Zapatista women brought forth what they termed Women's Revolutionary Law. The law contains very progressive provisions for indigenous women. It demands women's right to political participation and leadership positions within the community. It establishes the right to work, education and health; and the right to decide for themselves their partners in marriage.

The main representative of indigenous women in the EZLN,

Commander Ramona, said: "The act of women arming themselves is very important; it demonstrates that we are all equally engaged, and women came to understand their situation and to want to change it..."<sup>3</sup>



Although the policies of the EZLN have veered toward opportunism, and more recently toward sectarianism and ultra-leftism; at the moment, the Zapatista wom-

en play an important role in the defense of their communities. Women's Revolutionary Law has been a valuable contribution to the feminist movement. Organizations such as ours should not dismiss these achievements; on the contrary, they serve as a reference for the construction of a revolutionary and socialist program that is inclusive of indigenous women.

### **Women against violence and femicide**

The struggle against femicide is more than legitimate; it has turned into an urgent necessity in order to successfully stop the murder of women. Because of the urgency, organizations have risen in Ciudad Juárez and have launched a fight against the most rotten of the political class. This is a risky fight, given the violent reaction of the government and organized crime.

Organizations formed by mothers and relatives of the victims, such as Return Our Daughters Home, were among the first to summon mobilizations in Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City to demand justice for the murders and punishment for those responsible.

Unfortunately, this movement has been co-opted by social democrats, represented mainly by the PRD. The PRD managed to derail the mobilization, calling for “dialogue” and trust in the government to solve these atrocious assassinations. This mis-leadership has led the movement into isolation. Currently, the movement is composed mainly of nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s) and without a greater social base. In order to create an alternative to the PRD, the Left would have to launch a policy that prioritizes this mobilization and draws all sectors of the proletariat to participate. This could be achieved either through unions or political organizations.

### **For the decriminalization of abortion**

The decriminalization of abortion in Mexico City is a result of decades of struggle by feminist groups; but in its last phase, it was impelled primarily by NGOs and by the PRD. They beat the revolutionary left to the punch in an important achievement of the feminist struggle.

But revolutionary organizations need not yield to these organizations in the important fight for abortion rights. Now that this

vital triumph has been achieved, we must go further. Now is the moment to raise decriminalization of abortion in the entire country. In addition, we need to again take up demands for scientific sex education and free contraceptives as a public policy to prevent the need for abortion. We should agitate with these demands among female workers, who are the ones most affected by policies directed at controlling women’s bodies.

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[bis.]