International Women's Day – A Celebration of Struggle

Today women face discrimination, violence and attacks on their rights in the U.S. and around the world. With the election of Trump and the Republican majority in Congress the attacks on women's reproductive rights, healthcare and overall conditions of life face more assaults than ever. And when a president openly expresses horrendous attitudes towards women, it encourages the prejudices and gives permission to men to treat women in violent and disrespectful ways.

It is definitely a time to organize and fight back. And that is what many women, and their allies, did this past week on March 8, International Women's Day. This year, March 8, was set as the date for women's strikes and protests around the world, following a series of strikes and mass demonstrations last year when women poured into the streets of Poland, Ireland, Turkey, Italy, Argentina, Iceland and other countries.

The call for the International Women's Strike said: "We, the women of the world, are fed up with violence addressed at us, physical, economic, verbal and moral. We will no longer tolerate it passively." Their demands dealt with issues ranging from violence against women and reproductive rights to social demands like the minimum wage, labor rights, equal pay, public services, and health care and opposition to racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia.

Women in 50 countries, on every continent, participated. All over the U.S. women held protests and meetings, and stopped work, to demonstrate the importance of the work that women do - both paid and unpaid.

International Women's Day is recognized in 25 countries as an official holiday, but the United States is not one of them, yet the holiday was born here. The history of the holiday goes back to 1908 when 15,000 women garment workers marched through New York City to demand shorter work hours, higher pay, and voting rights. The following year saw a 13-week strike of immigrant women garment workers against Triangle Shirtwaist and other sweatshops in New York City. The strike continued through the brutal winter and was known as the "Uprising of the 20,000."

Inspired by the struggles of the women garment workers in the U.S., German socialist Clara Zetkin called for a day to mark working women's international solidarity. In 1910, women from 17 countries attended the Second International Conference of Working Women, sponsored by socialist groups from around the world. It called for the designation of a special day, March 8th, as International Working Women's Day.

The following year, one million women throughout Europe marched in the streets to demand their rights on International Working Women's Day, and in following years they protested World War I, opposing a war they considered to against the interests of the workers of the world. In 1917, Russian women textile workers went on strike on International Women's Day in response to ongoing food shortages, demanding food for their families. This sparked the February Revolution, which overthrew the Russian Tsar and marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution where the working class took power and tried to set up a new society run by and for the workers and peasants. Since then many women around the world have held events to celebrate that day.

Women are primarily responsible for raising children and caring for the family. And women have been in the forefront of struggles to defend the environment and humanity overall. Women have played a leading role in the struggles in this country, for workers' rights, against racism, and against war as well as fighting for women's rights. We saw a turnout of millions of women in the U.S. and around the world on January 21. It is a sign of hope that we are celebrating this history of struggle in the U.S. and that once again women are playing a leading role in fighting for a better future for us all.