

Build a Women's Wave Worldwide!

Defeat Authoritarian, Right-Wing and Neo-Fascist Parties and Movements!

Mariam Dhawale

Women activists from the Left progressive parties and movements gathered at Essen, Germany last month in the Feminist Futures Festival organised by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung to share their experiences about their struggles when combating the right-wing forces in their respective countries and discuss strategies and ideas for an international networking to strengthen this movement. The participants included women from the continents of Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America. This event was organised for the first time.

The Die Linke Party had organised a seminar as part of this festival where participants, from diverse sections, were meeting each other for the first time. It was a very happy occasion to meet women activists fighting for gender equality in countries around the world. The atmosphere at the seminar was very enthusiastic and all were eager to learn from each other.

Various feminist issues were presented and discussed. This was a special event for women of partner parties of Die Linke from all over the world. The seminar did not have a formal structure. It was an open workshop format where the participants shared experiences and insights into how to influence party structures, set political agendas and strengthen women's rights. There was a vibrant exchange of methods, strategies and examples in order to learn from each other. The participants discussed challenges and explored ways in which women's participation and representation can be increased and sustained in left parties and movements.

All over the world authoritarian and right-wing forces have not only gained ground but have also won elections and formed governments. They are pursuing a discourse that is anti-democratic, anti-feminist and racist and are inciting hatred against the left, minorities and LGBTQI groups. Democratic, social and political rights are being questioned and dismantled.

Many countries have reiterated equal rights for women either in their Constitutions or state policies. But the reality is that discrimination and inequality is rampant. Increasing violence against women all over the world is another area of major concern.

There was consensus that women's participation in politics should be encouraged. We must encourage women to enter politics, especially from the rural areas. Women are under-represented in Party structures. This should be corrected.

Ivet Lopez from Cuba elaborated on the policies of the Cuban government which has helped women to emerge as independent human beings. Women make up 50 per cent of the employees in government bodies. 45 per cent of members in political parties are women. A very large section of teachers,

doctors, engineers and other professionals are women. She expressed regret that in spite of socialist principles being followed in Cuba, patriarchal structures still exist and this is reflected in the movies and music videos.

The socialist state of Vietnam has policies to protect women, stated Van from the Communist Party. Many resolutions have been passed by the Party to promote gender equality. Political participation of women is increasing. Yet it is difficult for women to overcome the restraints they face due to family responsibilities.

Delegates from Germany opined that though 50 per cent of all elected positions were reserved, the challenge before them was how to make the Party attractive for women. Women should also be a part of policy making within the Party. Women are usually treated as assistants and not leaders. They are usually allotted education and health portfolios in the government whereas defence and finance are given to men. Young women are raising their voice against patriarchy and fighting against the gap in wages of men and women. A large number of women make up the working class in the care sector. So trade unions need to take a note of this factor.

Women are 30 per cent of the Party membership in Belarus. But domestic duties prevent their active participation in politics. Yanina said that women in Belarus clearly see the difference between the socialist and capitalist systems. During the Soviet Union era, women had equal rights. They were protected and the state encouraged their participation in economic and social spheres. Laws and policies were designed to promote women's participation. She lamented that alas, all this has been dismantled now. Now women are fighting for a 7 hour working day so that it enables them to get some rest.

Prof Maria from Greece strongly pointed out that the Party must take into account the family responsibilities of women party members and stop functioning in a patriarchal manner. Abortion rights are under attack in Greece and France.

Namibia has 46 per cent women elected to Parliament. Yet the contribution of women in developing society is not recognised.

Fida was a Palestinian living in Israel. She elaborated on the intense struggles for the rights of Palestinians going on in Israel. She narrated heart-rending instances of the repression let loose by the Netanyahu regime and the resistance of the people.

It is not easy for women to traverse through Party structures in Tanzania, reported Dorothy. It is a challenge to make women understand that they are equal partners and capable of taking up responsibilities.

Finland is grappling with the issues of single mothers. Since they are providers for the family, their participation in Party activities is restricted. The question of how to bring women with growing children in politics needs serious thought.

Citalli from Mexico and Clara from Spain opined that we have to take special efforts to bring the women's movement closer towards the Left. Women's issues should also be raised by the Left movements.

Fabiana from Argentina expressed the need to break hierarchies and lamented that trade unions do not take up the issue of women's wages. Women are assigned secondary roles in the Party. Men within the Party do not take part in discussions to end this patriarchal attitude.

Minetu representing Sahrawi Women said that women participated in all activities from 1975 to 1991 in Western Sahara. After the ceasefire, men returned to their homes. This has changed the situation for women and adversely impacted on their active participation in the socio-economic sphere.

The deepening of the capitalist crisis, hunger and climate change has had a very negative impact on women's lives, stated Leyla from Turkey. Many feminist movements do not question the exploitative economic system. We have to strategise methods to give a leftward shift to feminism.

Mariam Dhawale explained the rightward shift in India and the pro-corporate, anti-poor, anti-women character of the Modi-led BJP government. The adverse changes being made in land and labour laws are leading to devastation of the lives of the peasantry and the working class. The Modi government is succumbing to the dictates of the imperialist governments. The BJP government's policies of the last few years have landed India into an unprecedented economic crisis, which is marked by factory closures, farmer suicides and massive unemployment.

Changes being made in the education system will restrict the right to education for the masses. Distortion and falsification of history is being done to promote an anti-minority and unscientific culture. Superstitions and anti-women practices are being glorified. Communal and casteist propaganda and politics of hatred have vitiated the socio-political atmosphere.

She elaborated on the role of the women's movement and AIDWA in taking up issues of food, employment, land rights, health and violence. She also explained the role played by the CPI(M) in building resistance against the right-wing forces.

The problem of women not being able to devote as much time as they would like to Party work due to unpaid domestic work and family responsibilities was the common refrain by the participants from all the countries.

Two panel discussions by Die Linke party were held in the Feminist Festival on 'Leftist and Feminist Strategies against a Policy of Hatred' and on 'Issues and Struggles by the Women's Movement'. One panel included Reihanna Mohideen from Phillipines, Aurea Carolina from Brazil, Dorothy Semu from

Tanzania and Mariam Dhawale from India. The second panel included MinetuSueidat from Western Sahara, Emma Sheerin from Ireland, Fabiana Rios from Argentina, Binda Pandey from Nepal, Dorothy Semu and Mariam Dhawale.

There was a comradely and lively discussion regarding the diverse situation of women in different countries. The struggle for gender equality is the common thread of all the feminist movements in various countries. Women are victims of violence and are subjected to discrimination in all unequal societies. Hence the need to build networks and learn from each other was the consensus in the workshop. Women have also to join the fight against the right-wing forces worldwide.

The participants invited by the Die Linke were **Latin America**—Ivet Lopez (Communist Party of Cuba); Fabiana Rios (Patagonian Social Party, Argentina); Andrea Florencia Puente (RSL, Argentina); Flavia Santos and Aurea Carolina de Freitas e Silva (Socialism and Liberty Party, Brazil); Minerva Hernandez and Citalli Mora (National Regeneration Movement, Mexico);**Europe** - YaninaHuzouskaya (A Just World, Belarus); Prof Maria Gasouka (Syriza, Greece); Silla Mari Kakkola (Left Alliance, Finland); Dominique Tripet (French Communist Party); Emma Sheerin (Sinn Fein);Antonia Todic (Levica, Slovenia); Clara Alonso (United Left, Spain); Johanna Bussemer, Dagmar Enkelmann, Birte Keller (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Germany); Friederike Benda, Danny Butter, Anja Eichhorn, AlicjaFlisak, Jana Hofmann, Katharina Tetzlaff, KatrinVob, Julia Wiedemann, Kerstin Wolter,Nina Eumann(Die Linke, Germany);**Asia** – Mariam Dhawale Communist Party of India (Marxist); Binda Pandey (Nepal Communist Party); Van Thi Hoang Nguyen (Communist Party of Vietnam);ReihannaMohideen (Party of the Laboring Masses, Philippines);Fidaa Nara (Haddash, Israel);**Middle East** – Wian Haji (Iraqi Communist Party); Leyla Imtre (People’s Democratic Party, Turkey);**Africa** – Lahan Cecile Dakouo (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence, Mali);UtaaraMootyu (Landless People’s Movement, Namibia); Corinne Camille (RezistansekAlternativ, Mauritius);OulimataNiang (Party of Independence and Labour, Senegal); Dorothy Semu(Alliance for Change and Transparency, Tanzania);MinetuLarabasSueidat (National Union of Sahrawi Women, Western Sahara). They represented diverse cultures and struggles.

The Feminist Futures Festival was the largest such gathering in Germany for decades. It was held in the ‘Zeche’ (colliery), a former coal mine. Four days of this festival held in September 2019 were filled with brain-storming sessions, debates and networking. More than 60 workshops, exhibitions, movie/documentary screenings, discussions were organised during this festival. It saw the energetic participation of more than 1500 women and men from around 40 countries. This festival gave the clear call enunciated by the legendary Spanish Communist woman leader Dolores Ibarruri (La Passionaria) – “No Pasaran” to the authoritarian, right-wing and neo-fascist parties and movements worldwide. The dream to build an equal, exploitation-free and gender-just world was reiterated. Participants returned to their homelands fully charged with new hope and determination.