Right-wing policies have deepened gender inequalities, writes João Pimenta Lopes.

One strategy of capitalism to deal with its growing and systemic crisis is to bring in new ideological concepts that divert attention from the issues at hand and their root causes.

Employability, entrepreneurship, flexibility and ‘flexisecurity’ are among the terms used by the EU to disguise rising inequalities and exploitation of the working classes.

These terms attempt to transfer the responsibility for the ongoing crisis and its consequences, such as unemployment, to the workers while promoting a social consciousness of acceptance of workers’ exploitation, at the service of the economic and profit interests of the patronage.
The term 'empowerment' - as opposed to real emancipation - is an example of this creation or reinvention of concepts.

Instead of defending social and economic emancipation, a concept that implies the elevation of the class consciousness and the struggle to overcome inequalities between women and men, as well as social and class inequalities, the concept of empowerment is promoted, along with instruments aiming to promote 'women's ability to secure decent jobs' and 'accumulate assets'.

Unsurprisingly, many reports presented in Parliament propose - as part of these instruments of 'empowerment' - the creation of new lines of credit for women so they can 'take hold of their own future'.

These instruments promote debt and further dependence of women. This is an example of an ideological class concept that transfers the responsibility of a social and economic condition to the individual, while removing from the equation the political framework that actually creates such a condition.

Many proposals have been put forward to create the illusion of addressing the exploitation and discrimination of women.

The current reality shows us the opposite; 118 million people remain at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU28, of which 62.4 million are women (2015). The unemployment rate remains highest among women, while they have the lowest employment rate (59.6 per cent vs. 70.1 per cent in 2014).

Women are more vulnerable to precarious work; they have the highest rate of part-time and temporary jobs; women are paid 16 per cent less than their male counterparts and have a pension gap imposed that stands at 40 per cent.

There are plenty of other examples that show that inequality and discrimination against women remain firmly rooted in Europe.

Inequality between men and women, as well as class inequality, has deepened due to member states' right-wing policies, and aggravated due to the macroeconomic, sectorial and austerity policies of the EU.

These policies have imposed strong attacks both on labour rights and social protection, as well as public services, leading to the impoverishment of people and the working class in the member states. The struggle for women's rights is inevitably linked to the fight against these right-wing policies and true emancipation through the elevation of women's social and political consciousness.
One can only truly tackle and reverse inequality with labour and social policies that guarantee, inter alia: the end of precarious work; strong restrictions in the use of temporary work; an increase in salaries and the implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work; the reduction and regulation of working hours; strong defence of collective bargaining; guaranteed universal free access to high-quality public healthcare and education services.

About the author

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Tags
Economic Affairs [7]
Employment and Social Affairs [8]

Categories
Economics and finance [9]
Education and skills [10]
Society and welfare [12]