

1936-1968

Liberations: Popular Front, war and emancipation movements

From one general strike to another, from one event to another: the time period that begins in 1936 and goes until May 1968 is punctuated by powerful moments. The strike, a demonstration of working-class anger, feeds from the awareness of exploitation and fuels it at the same time. The wish for social justice and the struggle for emancipation is always expressed throughout those movements. Could these fights share a common cause? Could the fight for feminism and the proletariat go hand in hand? These multifaceted women are put to the test during this period punctuated by wars and conflicts. They are then allowed to be more than their "husband's wives". They occupy a unique position, they protest and fight. During the Second World War, women protest in spite of danger and resist. During the Libération, some of them take to the barricades. Subsequently, their determination allows them to have more rights, the right to vote in particular, which has been claimed for a long time: the citizenship of women is finally recognised. In the following years, many women, factory workers, employees or housewives take to the streets. During the Algerian war, the streets fill up with movements, marches and dissent

- women take part in them, but are sometimes rendered invisible or violently repressed. And finally, during May 68, everything is overturned when women open up the marches, denounce the forms of violence that they are trying to defuse, and try to destroy every hierarchy, including the patriarchy.

The Popular Front

They raise their fists. They wear the red star and Phrygian cap. Their songs intertwine "La Marseillaise" and "L'Internationale". In the streets, one sees processions of workers, employees, or housekeepers. They sometimes wave the symbols of their trade: cleaning ladies come with their sweeping brushes. The strike starts: everything stops. The Popular Front highlights the role of women in major social mobilisations. A powerful gesture is created, profoundly anti-fascist, in moments when joy and gravity mix.

During the war

War does not seem to be compatible with the streets being taken and protests in broad daylight. However, defying the occupation and authorities, many women get organised and gather in different cities and all over the country to protest against the cost of living and food shortages. Among these acts of resistance, there are also these labour strikes, especially the miners, whose spouses, sisters and mothers support by protesting. Some of them paid for it with their lives, executed by Nazis.

Libération!

Women in the streets are those who set barricades up for the Libération and engage in final fights that create unexpected images. These are the resistant women who march in freed cities. Lucie Aubrac talks about those women, some of whom march with dignity, with a renewed sense of freedom during the big parade of summer 1944: "now that the entire country is but a large battlefield, women in France ensure continuity and the flame of resistance."

Algerian War of Independence

The wars of decolonisation also lead to strong movements, still little-known today.

Who remembers the Algerian women protesting on 17 October 1961? They are subjected to deadly police brutality. What about these same women, anxious to find their husbands, their brothers or their friends? "The Seine turned red that day", wrote Leïla Sebbar. A few months later, on 8 February 1962, several women, communists activists, are among the victims of the repression at the Charonne subway station. The protests, forbidden at the time, are first and foremost tragic events.

May-June 1968

Not only are they protesting, but they also are in charge of security: this is unheard of. They sit in the streets, during improvised sit-ins, which is unusual at the time. They wave flags, give speeches on the squares and at crossroads, sing on the pavements in front of the occupied factories, offices and stores. During May and June 1968, women are at the core of the general strike which, they know, shows contradictions. Indeed, the movement, is run by men, which is something they will denounce later on.

1968, year of global revolutions

Around the world, 1968 stands as a revolutionary year. The Chinese revolution, the Cuban experience and the Vietnamese resistance are seen like openings that undermine the established order and shatter the hegemonies. East and West, the two blocks are challenged, which destabilises and weakens them. Everywhere, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of the Warsaw Pact is contested, like the oppression in Mexico. In the years to come, people will keep saying: "This is only the beginning, let's keep fighting".