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# CORONAVIRUS AND CAPITALISM:

## STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

**'We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.'**

Source: [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)



## EDITORIAL

In this edition of Workers World News there is a two prolonged focus: one on the link between COVID 19 and capitalism, including state responses, and the other on the Rojava Revolution and an alternative to the state and capitalist system in the form of Democratic Confederalism.

The reason for the focus on COVID 19 is to reflect on the reality that we face, in terms of origins of COVID 19 and the impact it is having on the working class, especially women, in a context where neoliberalism has hollowed out social services – including healthcare. Indeed, in order to chart a way forward for our struggles it is vital to always have a sober analysis of the context we are in. In times of crises, however, it is also important to have hope. The Rojava Revolution and Democratic Confederalism is one source of hope in our dark times: it shows that through people organising a new world based on principles, values and practices such as egalitarianism, solidarity, social ecology, women's liberation and mutual aid can be won.

To this end, there are three articles that focus on the COVID 19 pandemic. In the lead article, Dale McKinley outlines how capitalist destruction of the ecology has led to the rise in the outbreak of viruses as natural barriers have been destroyed by industrial farming and the opening up of forests and the exploitation of wildlife. Nonetheless, he also argues that COVID 19 opens up the possibility of creating a more progressive world politically, socially and economically due to the shortfalls of the current system being so evident.

Alex Hotz unpacks how there perhaps should not be a one size fits all approach to dealing with the coronavirus, but also and how the state's response has been patriarchal. She outlines how the burden of unpaid, reproductive and care labour has fallen onto womxn as a result of capitalism and neoliberalism, and how the state's response to COVID 19 is likely to exacerbate this. Further, she outlines why in this context, feminist and intersectional politics need not just to be tools of analyses but an alternative too.

Leila Khan examines how the COVID 19 is impacting on the prison population internationally and the need in the context COVID 19 to move away from the punitive and dehumanising form of justice that exists under capitalism and the state system. Indeed, she outlines how prisoners are going to be one of the worst hit groups by COVID 19 due to the inhumane conditions that exist in prisons. She notes, however, that prisoners are beginning to self-organise in the face of COVID 19, pointing towards the fact that in a humane society, restorative justice and rehabilitation would be a far better alternative to the current prison systems.

Three articles in this edition examine the Rojava Revolution and Democratic Confederalism. The first article in the Education Series (which will run over 4 editions) looks at South Africa's stalled liberation and sets the basis for looking at Democratic Confederalism as a form of organising that can be used to build organisations that

### Foundations

Understandably, the dominant focus of most governments, media outlets and the general public both globally and in South Africa, has been on understanding and confronting the immediate impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In particular, this focus has been directed at global as well as national impacts and responses related to human health and economic relations.

For the most part however, what has been missing is an understanding of the pandemic's more foundational causes.

**... so little is known about it and that it is not an isolated case. The reasons for this are there to find if we look hard enough.**

Further, how, as we move through this unprecedented crisis, such an understanding can potentially provide fertile ground for some of the conceptual and practical, systemic changes we desperately need.

At the heart of the multi-level crises that this virus has unleashed is the fact that so little is known about it and that it is not an isolated case. The reasons for this are there to find if we look hard enough.

Namely, that the increased occurrence of largely unknown and ever-more-virulent viruses is directly linked to the nature/character of land use and food production under the neo-liberal model of capitalism; to the contemporary dominance of an 'industrial model' of agriculture that is tied to the never-ending search for maximum profits, whatever the human, social and/or environmental consequences.

More specifically there is a clear connection to the increase in mono-agriculture production, which entails the massive appropriation and exploitation of land (forests, jungles, small-scale farms etc.) by corporate and/or state owned and facilitated agri-business. This is practically achieved by the complimentary destruction of natural animal habitats and richly bio-diverse

areas through logging, clear-cutting, mining, road construction as well as rapid urbanisation.

In a recent public statement, the African Centre for Biosafety confirmed the foundational connections: "There are many examples of how ecosystem disruption causes diseases and outbreaks [wherein] ... most pandemics including HIV/AIDS, Ebola, West Nile, SARS, Lyme disease and hundreds more, have their roots in environmental change and ecosystem disturbances."

As evolutionary biologist Rob Wallace points out, the cumulative result, and more especially over the last 2-3 decades, is that the previously strong and vibrant natural defences against pathogens (which give rise to viruses) are being destroyed at an incredible rate.

In turn, this is creating ever expanding breeding grounds for new pathogens to which humans and other animals are exposed more than ever. David Quammen, author of the prescient book, Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic, puts it bluntly: 'We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.' The rise and rise of the (mostly illegal) wildlife trade over the last couple of decades in particular is a direct result of these developments.

**These are the structural realities that are central to the 'developmental' model of neo-liberal capitalism. This is so precisely because they facilitate and support corporate capital - in most instances actively facilitated and in some cases led by the state - to control, own and exploit land and resources at both national and global levels irrespective of any linked human, social, economic, political or ecological consequence.**

As the escalating crisis of climate change is tragically showing, unless there is a re-framing of human consciousness and practice centred

on planetary health (which links human and ecosystem health), then our world is heading for a future of perennial planetary disasters.

But this does not have to be the case.

### Opportunities

There will always be those, like the ideological cheerleaders of 'free market capitalism' and climate change deniers, who want us to believe that changing the status quo is impractical, the preserve of foolish (and of course, 'socialist') idealists. But as many of the responses to the pandemic are showing, the human impetus and will to embrace previously shunned social and economic policies as well as collectively-framed relationships of caring and solidarity, is not only practically possible but existentially necessary.

Besides the more immediate containment, prevention, treatment and socio-economic measures that have and will be taken, what this pandemic provides are opportunities to mutually address the structural realities at both a global and national level.

At a global level, such opportunities relate to:

- Gradual and systematic (socialised) changes in the dominant agricultural model; specifically, the replacement of mass, monocultural and factory production of crops (for both domesticated animal and humans) and animal meat with regenerative agro-ecology;
- Longer-term, climate-conscious and people centred changes in the model of industrial production, which have been outlined and argued for in great detail by a wide range of organisations, communities, activists and researchers;
- A phasing out of the illegal wildlife trade;
- The serious scaling back of narrow nationalist political, socio-cultural and economic agendas and relational behaviour and the rise of more universalist, inclusive, equal and humane values and behaviour that can inform changed political, economic and social policies and relations within and amongst nations

At a national level - and more specifically in South Africa - opportunities include:

# WHY WE NEED FEMINISM MORE THAN EVER

**"I have no more money, I have spent my small grant and my mother has spent her income as a domestic worker. Where can we get help?" This is the question that Susan Mazula asks.**

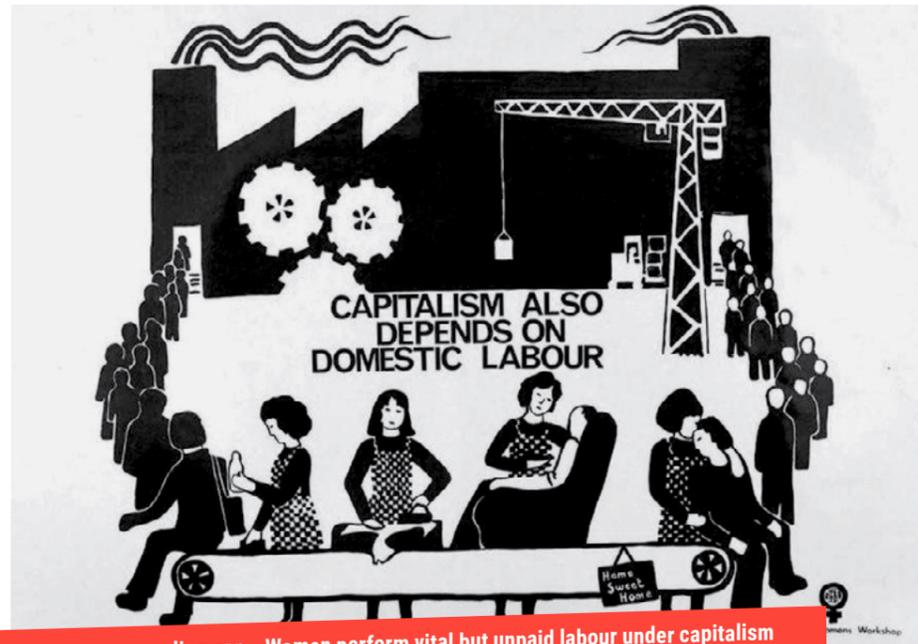
As we experience the lockdown as a response to "flattening the curve" of the spread of COVID-19, it is an important time to articulate why feminism is imperative, not just as a tool to analyse the pandemic and the broader ecological and economic crisis that it is born out of, but for us as feminist activists to begin to think of different ways to respond, organise and show solidarity.

As a lockdown becomes the recommended response to COVID-19 it has become clear that there needs to be a reimagining of how 'the Left' responds and shows solidarity. Many activists have felt that the lockdown is the best response to 'flatten the curve' but at whose expense? Is a one size fit all approach to the lockdown really going to work in the context of South Africa? The daily updates on the regulations seem to indicate that the one size fits all does not work in all contexts.

Historically, crises and pandemics have not always forced us to break with the past. In many instances, states have failed to learn from passed crises and pandemics such as HIV-Aids etc. But what is clear from this pandemic is that it has shown up the effects the fault-lines of austerity measures of the past.

**What we see today, did not start with the pandemic – the virus is a manifestation of a deeper multiple crisis; an ecological crisis; crisis of capitalism and a social crisis. Sadly, the only solution that states can seem to find, is in repurposing neoliberalism with sprinkles of economic reforms. Much of what the state is calling for is 'behavioural change' and not structural change.**

While the virus does not discriminate in terms of those contracting the virus, it is clear the pandemic doesn't have the same consequences for everyone – the impact and consequences are gendered, racialized and classed. Womxn as usual, especially the most marginalised womxn such as black womxn, womxn on farms, womxn in townships, poor womxn, differently-abled womxn, unemployed womxn – have been forgotten in the response to COVID-19.



Source: www.mroline.org – Women perform vital but unpaid labour under capitalism

The burden of care work in a patriarchal society is always the burden of womxn. Feminist economists have pointed out that the current neoliberal economic model externalises the economic, social and political costs onto womxn. Thus the most marginalised womxn disproportionately carry the burden of injustice of neoliberalism. The struggle of working class womxn to survive puts into the fore how the state, markets, family and various institutions deploy hetro-patriarchal capitalism to entrench the subsidisation of social reproductive labour that goes unpaid. Central to the operating of capitalist society is the unpaid labour and care-work of womxn. However, what we see is the erosion of all social services, social protection and the burden of care that continues to burgeon onto womxn.

**As a lockdown becomes the recommended response to COVID-19 it has become clear that there needs to be a reimagining of how 'the Left' responds and shows solidarity.**

As feminist activists the challenges that we confront during this pandemic are multipronged as the state's responses fail to deal with the many burdens womxn face: whether it be in relation to health care, food, education, and work.

Therefore, confronting these challenges require feminist alternatives in all aspects of society be it from economics, the law, food and agriculture, health, education, etc. Therefore, the tactics that we employ should equally challenge the tactics and organising of the past that often reinforce sexist notions of mobilising and organising towards revolution. We should be more aware of our positionalities so that we don't reinforce top-down and unequalitarian ways of being that exist in even the seemingly progressive spaces. How do those of us who are activists facilitate solidarity and support without taking away agency of comrades and communities we are trying to support?

The lockdown is a reminder of the police state that the post-1994 state inherited. Womxn experience violence not only in their homes and at work but state-sponsored evictions from farms and private or state-owned property. The state before the lockdown was unwilling to deal with horrific rate of gender-based violence that womxn and LGBTIQ+ people face on a daily basis. Where were the provisions of the state other than a hotline for womxn who have to endure a lockdown with abusers? What is clear is that womxn in various corners of South Africa have had to organise and develop their own responses to hold the state accountable during this period. Feminist demands that are not separate demands to economic demands, political demands, social demands, are often ghettoised and not seen as part of the broad

demands that organisations, movements and coalitions should be making. Important is that our demands need to be intersectional.

The burden of womxn in a patriarchal, racist, capitalist society has not subsided during this pandemic.

**...the virus does not discriminate in terms of those contracting the virus**

In fact, the burden is burgeoning and we need to show intersectional solidarity, facilitate the ability to continue to organise and defend womxn from authoritarianism and violence in any form. Intersectional feminist solidarity means that womxn should not continue to maintain the burden of struggling for feminist/women demands while men in our movements continue to demand a masculinist revolution that perpetuates the exclusion of womxn, queer folk, differently-able people that experience multiple levels of oppression. I hope that this moment allows us to reimagine and fight for another world. It is also a moment that feminists can use to illustrate who benefits from the care economy. ■



**Womxn experience violence not only in their homes and at work but state-sponsored evictions from farms and private or state-owned property.**

## Pull-out poster

Poster by: Leila Khan

### Lead article continued:

- The gradual, short-medium term building of a capacitated, well-resourced and managed public healthcare system supported by and integrated with the private side;
- Much more inclusive/democratic and efficient management and provision of basic needs and services on a universal, equitable and public-public scale;
- A clear and sustainable programme of building and maintaining public infrastructure related to transport, housing,

health, education, water and sanitation;

- The socialisation (i.e. public and cooperative ownership and management, not simply nationalisation) of land, natural resources and public enterprises, which would provide fertile terrain for all of the above to become sustainable.

Arguably the most crucial opportunity that traverses every other one mentioned is for a changed human consciousness and practice. The 'catchwords' that should inform and animate the approach to this pandemic, at both the more immediate and longer-term structural levels of response are: equality, trust, creativity, resilience, compassion, social solidarity, common respect and yes, love.

It is not likely that the coronavirus pandemic will occasion the demise of the capitalist system for the foreseeable future. However, what is much more likely to happen and indeed to be welcomed

by the majority of humanity, is the potential to catalyse opportunities for positive, progressive human and nature-centred change at collective and individual levels.

Such change, in practice, can show that not only are there alternative (non-capitalist) ways of living and doing at levels of political, social and economic relations, but that human beings are (as they have always been) capable of changing their world for the better. ■

**Arguably the most crucial opportunity that traverses every other one mentioned is for a changed human consciousness and practice.**

### Editorial continued:

can become alternatives to capitalist modernity and the nation state system.

Ercan Ayboga looks at the key pillars of Democratic Confederation including ecology in the Guest Article. He traces how the Kurdish Freedom Movement views the domination of the ecology as being linked to domination of an elite over the majority of people, especially women. From there he traces how ecological activists have been organising within Turkey under Democratic Confederation

In the My Organisation article, Rohash Shexo looks at women self-organising under the banner of Kogra Star as part of the Rojava Revolution. She outlines how Kogra Star has been central to bringing about women's liberation in Rojava in all spheres of life whether politically, socially or economically. ■

**GUEST ARTICLE** By Ercan Ayboga

## ECOLOGY IN DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM



Mesopotamia Ecological Movement – Protest by the Mesopotamia Ecological Movement

In the Kurdish areas of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran there is a struggle taking place to build a counter-power that goes beyond and ultimately aims to end capitalism and the state. This struggle is based on building confederated community councils and worker co-operatives. In northern Syria, this system has been fully implemented through the Rojava Revolution and is based on Democratic Confederalism (see education section of this newsletter or contact ILRIG for a copy of the Rojava Revolution booklet). This article looks at the ecological struggles linked to Democratic Confederalism and how the Mesopotamia Ecology Movement arose out of it.

The introduction of the capitalist economy in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria in the 1950s led to the destructive exploitation of nature and people. Like in many countries of the Global South, investments, mining and industrial agriculture led to millions people being displaced to the fast growing cities. The result – especially after the 80s - was the deepening of the loss of solidarity and communality in everyday life and the economy.

### Ecology Discussions and Theoretical Approach

In the 1990s the Kurdish Freedom Movement (KFM) and its leader Abdullah Öcalan started to discuss the ecological question, which took place against the background of the destruction of livelihoods in Bakur (the Kurdish region of Turkey) through the Turkish State's war on the Kurds. Apart from the impacts of the war, Öcalan also analysed the links between the expansion of capitalist modernity, the climate crisis and the growing alienation of humans to nature.

After the international kidnapping of Öcalan in 1999 a broad discussion started on restructuring the theory and practice in the KFM. Past revolutions, new political/social movements and thinkers all around the world were discussed and analysed as part of this process. Real socialism and the Marxist Leninist ways of organizing a revolution were criticized without becoming reformist. The nation state and hierarchy were rejected and through analyses it became clear these could not be used to bring about liberation. Rather, the overall aim of the KFM became the goal of building an ethical and solidarity-based society in harmony with nature. As an outcome of these discussions a new political concept called "Democratic Confederalism" was developed and was declared in 2005. An ecological approach to life was also central to Democratic Confederalism as well as a radical democracy that goes beyond parliamentarism.

The most important aspect of Democratic Confederalism is women's liberation. With the rise of patriarchy and institutionalized hierarchical

structures 5000 years ago in the Middle East it was women who were the first to be exploited and oppressed. This political-ideological formation also led to the domination and destruction of nature by humans.

The KFM views nature as the body of all living beings, including humans. Before big cities and capitalism, there was a strong connection with nature. Under capitalist modernity, however, humans living in urban centers are usually weakly connected to nature. Due to the alienation between human beings, which contributes significantly to the alienation between nature and human beings, nowadays nature is over exploited. Despite everyone experiencing the impacts of grave ecological destruction in the last decades, the destruction of nature is accelerating. Thus the current approach of capitalist modernity is a betrayal of nature and we are facing an "ecocide".

If nature is treated respectfully and human beings met only their needs, nature would not experience serious destruction and the ecosystems would have the capacity to recover. But what are the needs of people today? This question should not be left only to biologists or economists, rather it relates to the question of democracy, i.e. whether a society can take decisions under radically democratic conditions free from imposed exploitative-extractive economic policies and democratically collectively decide what our needs really are and how to meet them ecologically.

In order to establish a better relationship between humans and nature we have to understand how the dominant political-economic system – capitalism and nation-states - destroys the ecology along with oppressing and exploiting majority of humans, especially women.

**Before big cities and capitalism, there was a strong connection with nature. Under capitalist modernity, however, humans living in urban centers are usually weakly connected to nature.**

That is why being ecological means criticizing all processes in society and discussing alternatives for producing and consuming, feeding, housing etc. For such alternatives, among others, "industries based on ecology" are necessary. This seems to be controversial as industrial activities have massively contributed to the destruction of the environment. Thus the question is how to reorganize industry in terms of technology

(eco-technology), capacity and management from an ecological perspective and break with the existing concept of economic growth.

### Practice in North Kurdistan

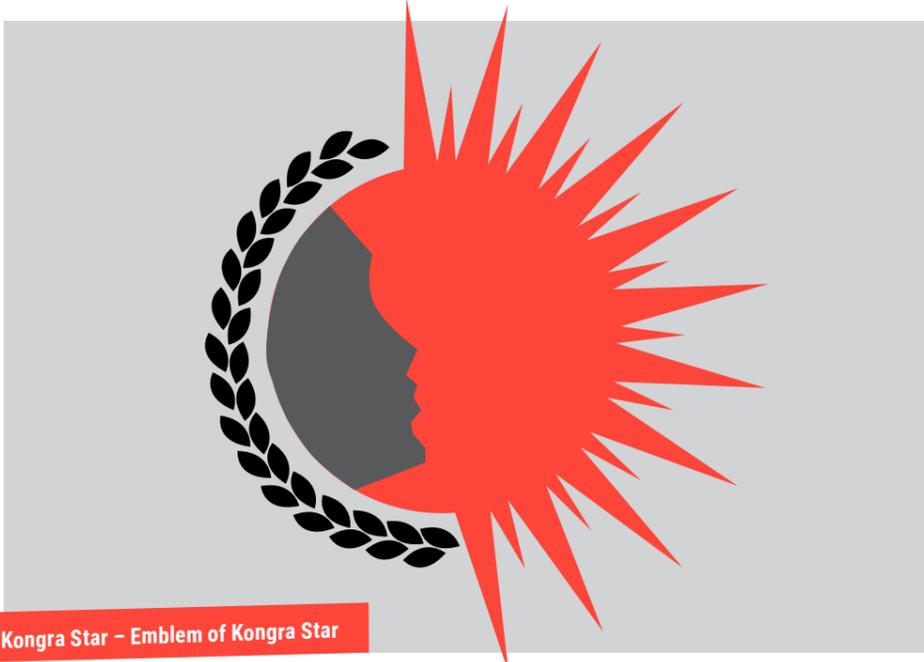
After 1999 the first ecological campaigns began in North Kurdistan (Bakur). In the first years they targeted destructive dams on rivers like the Dersim and Tigris/Hasankeyf. After 2005 the implementation and growth of Democratic Confederalism encouraged ecological activists in their political work. In the following years there was a steady increase of groups working on ecological campaigns and issues, which included social ecology theory. However, at the same time capitalist modernity launched its destructive forces in Bakur. As a result, the need to form a coalition of ecological groups and activists in Bakur became necessary.

In 2010 an Ecology Forum in Bakur was organised by activists. As a consequence the "Mesopotamia Ecology Movement" (MEM) was initiated. The MEM became part of the Democratic Society Congress (KCD) which is the umbrella structure for the political self-administration (called Democratic Autonomy) in Bakur based on Democratic Confederalism. The KCD is composed of the people's assemblies from the neighborhoods, civil society organisations, social movements, KFM municipalities and political parties. The latter is only one of the many actors and cannot dominate the others.

In 2015 the MEM restructured itself to become a broad social movement. Councils in each province of Bakur were established, which offered space for political activists working on ecology. Cooperation with neighborhood assemblies became important. With its growing actions, projects and campaigns, the MEM was able to enhance the importance of the ecology – of which humans are part – in the KCD. From the first moment the MEM, which was mainly Kurdish, sought strong relations with Turkish ecologists. As the common "enemy" is the Turkish state, it is logical to work closely together by overcoming nationalism in Turkish society.

The political work of the MEM can be classified into four fields. The first one is the struggle against the destructive and exploitative investments/projects of the Turkish state and private companies. The second is the war of the Turkish state against the Kurds and nature – the main issues are forest fires and destruction of livelihoods. The third field is to develop projects for an alternative society and economy – like the reproduction of local seeds and establishment of land cooperatives. The final field is education. ■

## KONGRA STAR: DEFEND THE WOMEN'S REVOLUTION IN SYRIA

**MY STRUGGLE** by Rohash Shexo


Kongra Star – Emblem of Kongra Star

Kongra Star women's movement started its work in 2005 organising women in Rojava and Syria. It seeks to develop a free Rojava, a democratic Syria, and a democratic Middle East by promoting women's freedom and the concept of Democratic Nation.

The Rojava Revolution, which started in 2012, has to be understood as a women's revolution. Kongra Star was central to the social organising during the beginning of the Revolution. Since then it has been growing continuously focusing on all areas of women's lives including education, culture and arts, economy, self-defence, social affairs, problem-solving and justice, politics, local government, ecology, media as well as international relations. With the aim of encouraging women to organise themselves in all areas of society and life, women across the northern areas of Syria began to come together in different towns and villages to organise themselves.

Within Kongra Star work is done with grass roots committees, there are for example, committees for social, political, city administration, for ecology, self-defence, justice and other important social areas. With these committees women are organised in all areas of life within communities and councils.

**It is important that women now have a system which supports them on all levels. Through the autonomous organisation of women, for example the economic level, thousands of women are now working in economic fields. They are now representing themselves and for the first time the co-chairing system has been established here in the region. This means that in all area of work and social life there is equal representation of women and men on the basis of a 50% gender quota.**

# DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM: A REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Since 2012, in the northern parts of Syria – also known as Rojava – a revolution has been taking place. The people living in Rojava – mainly Kurds, but also Arabs and Assyrians – have been trying to build a new society that is an alternative system to hierarchical states, capitalism and patriarchy that they call Democratic Confederalism.

## Lessons can be learnt from Democratic Confederalism

As ILRIG we believe this struggle to create a radical democracy without a state and based on an economy grounded in grass roots socialism can inspire struggles across the world and in South Africa.

What the Rojava Revolution and Democratic Confederalism shows is that we don't need to live in a world where politicians have power, where bosses exploit workers, where women are oppressed, and where there is ever increasing poverty and unemployment. It shows that another world is possible and that we can organise to win it ourselves through building inclusive organisations and through our own democratically controlled actions.

In the next 3 editions we will be looking at the ideas around Democratic Confederalism and lessons that can be used to try build bottom-up movements in South Africa. This is important because at the heart of Democratic Confederalism is self-organising, women's liberation and the desire to build a new world within the shell of the old: and it is this that has relevance for struggles in South Africa. So in the next few editions we will be looking at:

- how Democratic Confederalism as an idea and way of organising came about and the values, principles and vision that define it
- the details of the Rojava Revolution and how Democratic Confederalism has been put in place in the north-east of Syria

- and the lessons that can be drawn from the Rojava Revolution for activists in South Africa

## The incomplete liberation in South Africa and why the focus on Democratic Confederalism

In South Africa we have our own experience of liberation struggles. During the late 1970s and early 1980s working class people, through trade unions and community organisations like civics, fought the apartheid state. Many wanted socialism and a radical form of democracy; a society free of racism and sexism. In the 1980s activists tried to build a people's power, which included mass organising through street and defence committees that had the potential to create self-governance and overthrow the apartheid state.

**Capitalism in South Africa has always been based on the very low wages of black workers.**

By the 1990s, however, and with the negotiated settlement taking centre stage in the struggle, the idea and practice of people's power was gradually dismissed and dismantled. Rather, many people came to believe that the key to winning a more just and equal society lay with the African National Congress (ANC) gaining state power.

**Through the autonomous organisation of women, for example the economic level, thousands of women are now working in economic fields.**

We try to find solutions to overcome capitalism, which is spreading worldwide and is the cause of wars and crises. Fulfilling basic human needs is the most important task of the economy. Despite very limited possibilities, we have been able to make important progress

In the lead up to the 1994 elections, the ANC entered into negotiations with the apartheid state and the ruling class. A deal was eventually made that would see white capitalists (a small section of the white population that own the means of production) being allowed to keep their businesses and wealth. In return, the top leaders of the ANC were allowed to take over the state and some were also given shares in big companies.

Through this, many of the leaders of the ANC became part of the ruling class. This meant that the actual structure of the state was not changed and capitalism was kept in place. With this, the hopes that millions of people had of a more equal, non-racial and non-sexist society were severely undermined.

**The ANC once in power, pushed through a severe form of capitalism called neoliberalism. This favoured big businesses, but it also helped sections of the ANC get rich through tenders from the state and outsourcing.**

Capitalism in South Africa has always been based on the very low wages of black workers. After 1994 this did not change. This is why the legacy of apartheid capitalism still exists and millions of black working class people remain economically exploited and racially oppressed. After 1994 black working class women, as they had under apartheid, continued to form the bulk of the unemployed and low wage earners. They also subsidised the profits of big businesses, through unpaid work like feeding their families, providing care for their families, and raising future generations of workers.

For some activists, the struggle of liberation in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s was also for the liberation of women and for women to break free of patriarchal social relations. After 1994, this became a distant dream. Gender

relations were not fundamentally changed after 1994. Problems such as gender based violence remain as widespread as under apartheid. The government under the ANC, far from breaking away from patriarchal relations has strengthened them through amongst many things aligning with 'traditional' leaders in the former homelands and seeking to increase the power of these leaders – who are often conservative. The ANC is doing this to ensure the support and votes of traditional leaders.

**...we don't need to live in a world where politicians have power...**

The choices that were taken in the 1990s, therefore, have meant that full freedom has not been achieved. This was not inevitable though – it related rather to the choices that were made, including the ANC entering into state power, and the path of capitalist neoliberalism that was chosen.

The important thing about the Rojava revolution and Democratic Confederalism is that it shows that another path can be followed. As we will interrogate over the next 3 editions, Democratic Confederalism shows a structured direct democracy, but without the state, can be created and an economic system that beings to move beyond capitalism can be built. Rojava and Democratic Confederalism also shows how the dominant relations of patriarchy can be broken and how the liberation of women can happen in practice. Through this, it shows how via personal and collective change, combined with organising and mobilisation, activists and people can create a society of genuine freedom, equality, non-racism and non-sexism – in other words something we are still struggling for in South Africa. ■

## My Struggle article continued:

The women's revolution in Rojava became known all over the world mainly through the female fighters of the YPJ - The Women's Protection Units. In Rojava women organise and defend themselves on all levels. This also means on a military level against physical attacks. Women have participated in the armed struggle since the beginning of the Revolution. YPJ was founded in 2013 as a women's military defense force. According to their principles YPJ carries out legitimate self-defense against external physical attacks which target the land, society and especially women. Their aim is to build a democratic, decentralised, pluralistic Syria and to achieve women's liberation fighting against patriarchal mentality and military attacks. That's why YPJ is fighting at the front-lines as well as educating women so women can discover their personalities and contribute to building up a society in which justice, freedom and equality prevail.

But the revolution and the struggle for women's freedom cannot be achieved by military means alone. The organisation of society on all levels is much more important. This includes press work, economic work, education and much more.

In Rojava we are trying to develop our economic system.

In recent years. The work of the cooperatives, especially women's cooperatives, has become increasingly widespread. Most of the 16 cooperatives established so far have been in the agricultural sector. In addition, there are cooperatives in handicraft and food cooperatives in which hundreds of women work. Kongra Star tries to create a foundation for the development of cooperatives. Since in some areas both production and trade cooperatives have been established, they can also influence market prices. By setting up and working in the cooperatives, the women participate in economic life.

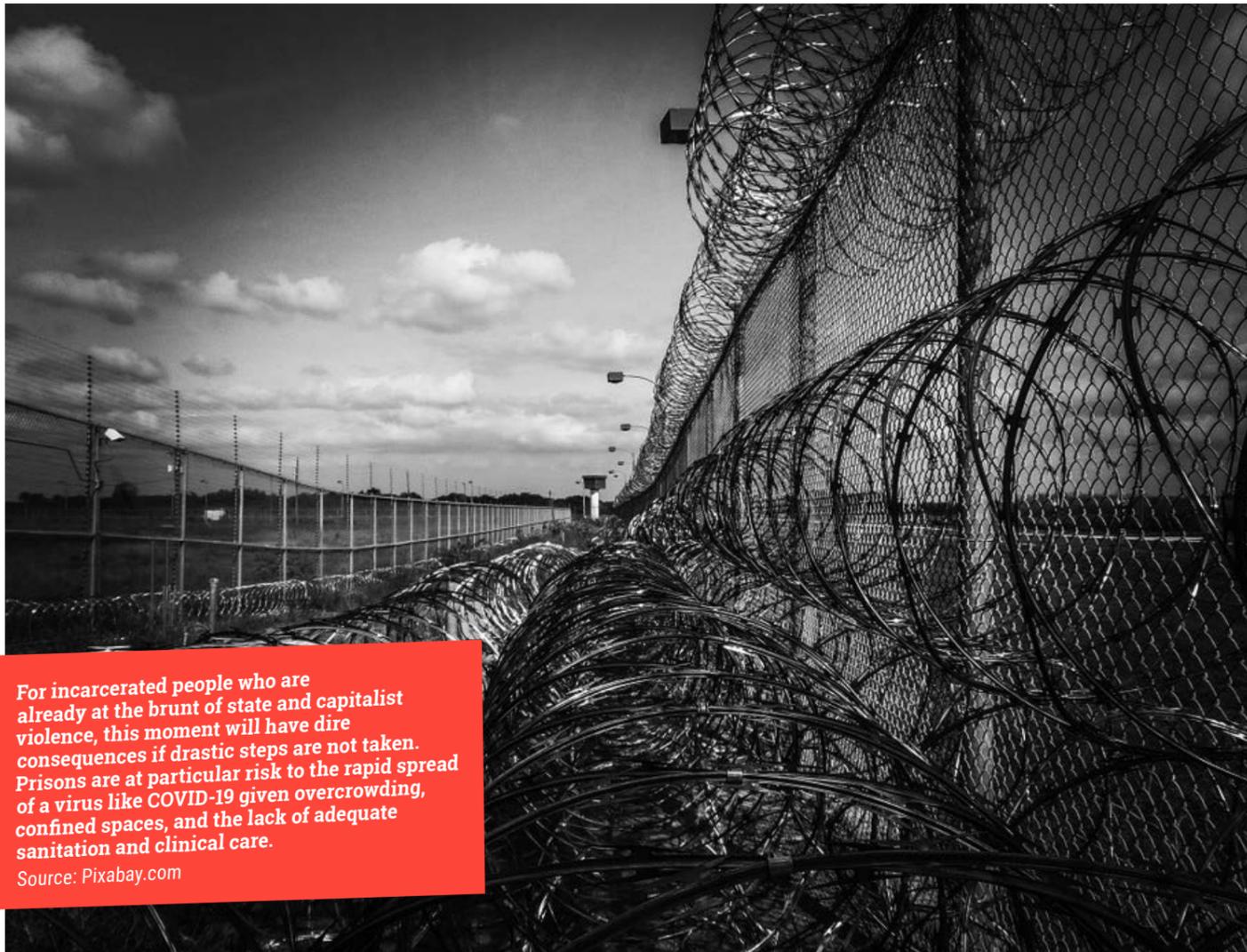
In recent years the most important achievement of women in Rojava is the creation of their own autonomous organisation and with this they determine their own way of working. Since we are in a war situation, self-defense of women and society is a priority for us. We have seen quite clearly: If we cannot defend

ourselves, we have no guarantee of life. Our most important achievement is our awareness of self-defense. Furthermore, women have reached a high political level and play a decisive role in politics. For the first time in history, women from our society are involved at all levels in decision-making processes.

Women have made great leaps in education, in drafting the social contract and rights. Much of what we have fought for and built are achievements that have inspired women in other Middle Eastern countries and around the world: We have succeeded in building unity and solidarity among women.

One of the most important topics for the future is the work on self-defense. The occupation of Rojava of the Turkish patriarchal state is an ongoing serious threat for us all. The misogynistic mentality of this occupation and its mercenaries threatens the women's revolution - and not only in Rojava. ■

# COVID-19 AND PRISONS



For incarcerated people who are already at the brunt of state and capitalist violence, this moment will have dire consequences if drastic steps are not taken. Prisons are at particular risk to the rapid spread of a virus like COVID-19 given overcrowding, confined spaces, and the lack of adequate sanitation and clinical care.

Source: Pixabay.com

The 'coronavirus' pandemic has placed the many structural crises of capitalism in sharp focus- from under-capacitated healthcare systems to the super-vulnerability of the poor and working classes to the virus.

For incarcerated people who are already at the brunt of state and capitalist violence, this moment will have dire consequences if drastic steps are not taken. Prisons are at particular risk to the rapid spread of a virus like COVID-19 given overcrowding, confined spaces, and the lack of adequate sanitation and clinical care.

Many prisons have limited toilet paper and soap, which inmates often have to purchase themselves. With over ten million people in the world behind bars, prisons should be a key part of state strategies to combat the virus.

Despite this reality, detention centres and prisons are a blind spot in many governments' plans to combat COVID-19 and plans to prevent the spread of the virus have been limited to suspending visitation, including of legal representatives. Incarcerated people around the world have, therefore, turned to protests and escape to defend themselves.

In Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) stopped deportations but put forward no plan for migrants in detention. This has led to a call by thirty-four inmates of the Laval Immigration Prevention Centre for their release in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten of the inmates are undergoing an indefinite hunger strike in line with this demand. Palestinians in Israeli prisons have also begun refusing meals to protest the lack of protective gear and a ban on visits from their lawyers. Inmates at a prison in France refused

to return to their cells after their daily walk, in response to the disregard for the welfare under the lockdown. In Colombia, twenty-three inmates were killed by police following riots in thirteen detention centres, as prisoners decried the lack of protections provided against the coronavirus. In Buriram Prison in Thailand, dozens of inmates broke windows and furniture, and set buildings alight after a rumoured COVID-19 outbreak at the facility. One thousand prisoners in Sao Paulo, Brazil escaped after prison furloughs were suspended in light of the virus. Riots have swept across fifty prisons in Italy. There are many more examples like this.

The situation is likely to become most drastic in the USA, which has the largest imprisoned population

in the world (2.3 million people), as well as the highest number of COVID-19 cases globally.

The situation is likely to become most drastic in the USA, which has the largest imprisoned population in the world (2.3 million people), as well as the highest number of COVID-19 cases globally. At present, 132 cases have broken out at Rikers Jail in New York City and the virus is spreading quickly, with an infection rate eighty-seven times

higher than the rest of the country. As social distancing is impossible in packed jails, this can fast become a nightmare scenario and quickly overwhelm the American healthcare system. Few provisions have been made to protect the imprisoned population, and the main focus has been suspending visits and limiting what little freedoms inmates have. Already, forty-five inmates in Rikers are refusing to leave the two dorms they share to do duties or eat meals in protest of the lack of protective equipment and their crowded living conditions. They are boldly calling for the release of inmates, in solidarity with prisoners making similar demands at the Hudson County Jail. If urgent action is not taken to prevent a healthcare disaster in the already disastrous context of prisons, governments everywhere will have mass avoidable death on their hands.

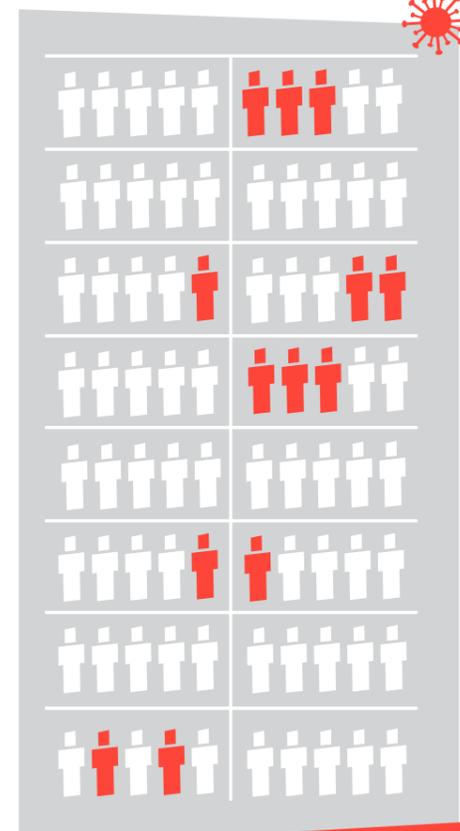
### "Care not Cages"

With the virus having brought many countries to a standstill, the time has come to take seriously the calls for decarceration and prison abolition emanating from within and outside of prison walls in order to reduce the incarcerated population. This requires following the call for "care not cages" from the international movement against the prison industrial complex Critical Resistance. This is necessary not only in the interests of public health, but also in preventing violence.

Prisons are central to the reproduction of violence in society, as many non-violent offenders are exposed to violence within jails and then have a tendency towards recidivism. Taking steps to care for convicted people and make genuine efforts at rehabilitation can be a more effective way to protect communities who are victim to violent crime than harsh punishment.

This includes heeding calls for the early release of non-violent offenders, especially those who are at risk to COVID-19. There is the option of house arrest and safe housing where available, along with regular check-ins. These are creative steps that are already being taking by countries like Iran, which has already released around thirty percent of its imprisoned population in response to COVID-19, as well as Ethiopia, which has released over four thousand inmates to combat overcrowding.

It is critical that South Africa incorporate these kinds of approaches in its COVID-19 policies around prisons. At present, the Department of Correctional Services has suspended visitations and has claimed that it will be sanitising correctional facilities. Worryingly, it has also boasted that a number of arrests have been made to enforce compliance with the lockdown regulations. In South Africa's notoriously under-resourced, violent and overcrowded prisons, it is a recipe for disaster to continue with business as usual and to detain even more people. We must use this moment to critically engage our systems of harm resolution so that we can find solutions outside of the current punitive methods, in order to prioritise healthcare for all, along with care and genuine reconciliation.



With over ten million people in the world behind bars, prisons should be a key part of state strategies to combat the virus.

With the virus having brought many countries to a standstill, the time has come to take seriously the calls for decarceration and prison abolition emanating from within and outside of prison walls in order to reduce the incarcerated population.



# ALL IS NOT LOST

BY BADRI RAINA

All is not lost.  
The young still feel the sting  
Of oppression.

Setting aside the quiescent  
Counsel of terrified time,  
They rise, singing a defiant rhyme.

Women, dragged by the hair,  
Lead the march of assertion  
Against the strategy of fear.  
While the batons of state  
Sought the men for correction,  
Women in hijab shielded the men.  
A new dauntless beauty was born,  
Promising a conjoint dawn.

The perfidious who seek to sunder  
confront an unsought wonder:  
those that the new law has included  
For nefarious favour march  
To embrace the excluded.

Young women and men  
Lay the foundation  
Of a second struggle for freedom  
And common love.

Let the failed elders now  
Take heed, relinquish petty

Feuds, and come to the table  
Of emancipation that the  
Young have seamlessly laid  
And sanctified with fresh blood.

Let there be no going back now.

Liberation

Suddenly, the gods are missing,  
The people are everywhere.

Those that were circumspect  
Seem to have shed their fear.

Thunder from the pulpit  
Is a shriek and a shout,  
A howl and a wounded plea  
From traumatic loss of clout.

When little men come to knowledge  
Of persistent subterfuge,  
The affront liberates their cowering souls  
Into the power of deluge.

What had seemed invincible  
Becomes a pack of cards;  
They come to look like mannequins  
That strutted like gods.

Hang on, dear people, everywhere,  
Oppressions have little sway  
Unless we choose to be befooled  
By the trickster of the day.

Do not give the found-out gods  
Excuse of violent wrath.  
Walk in peace and shared truth  
A democratic path.



## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Are you involved in progressive struggles or grassroots workplace/community organising that needs solidarity or that you think more activists should be made aware of? Do you have an analysis of or insights into a struggle or social/political/economic issue or development – whether local, regional or international – that is of interest or relevance to progressive/working class activists and struggles in South Africa that you would like to share? Do you have questions/comments about or disagreements with something published in Workers' World News?

Send us your article (max. 600 words) by email or Facebook private message and we will consider publishing it in a future issue.



### CALLING ALL CULTURAL ACTIVISTS

We would love to feature your artwork advocating for alternatives to capitalism, fascism and patriarchy. Please help us make this an inspiring publication by sending us your poetry & songs, photography & graphic design, paintings & drawings, reports & manifestos of cultural activist interventions etc.



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**EVERYWHERE IS RESISTANCE**

