

For a new Internationalism of Women

Democratic World Women's Confederalism

Internationalist Commune

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The Kurdish women's liberation movement presented its proposal for a democratic confederalism of women for the first time in October 2018 at the International Women's Conference in Frankfurt, which was organized by the network "Women Weaving the Future" under the title "Revolution in the Making". In its five-page declaration for this year's 8 March the KJK (Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, Communities of Women of Kurdistan) then addressed the following appeal to the women of the earth.

Meral Çiçek, REPAK, Silêmanî

The first principle of the women's liberation struggle is organization. Freedom cannot be possible without organization. It is necessary to transform protests into permanent organization. The conditions in this first quarter of the 21st century and the attitude of women make the struggle for freedom a possible challenge. We must therefore take our struggle to a higher level. We must organise our opposition and organise our struggle against the anti-democratic, dictatorial and ruling system. Because if our struggles are not integrated into one form, we cannot change sufficiently. The time has come, however, to make the women's revolution a reality and to turn the 21st century into a time of women's freedom. The conditions are more mature than ever. As a Kurdish women's freedom movement, we propose the name world women's confederalism for the unification of global women's struggles. The aim of world women's confederalism is to improve the unity of women's struggle by preserving autonomy. As women's organizations and movements, we should be able to develop common attitudes, overcome divisions, define common struggle strategies and tactics, and indeed cooperate and build common mechanisms. We need to discuss and jointly define the principles and principles of organisation necessary for this. The social contract, which we proclaimed as a movement in 2002 and on which we are currently working again and which we will soon share with you, can provide a fundamental framework for this.

Democratic world women's confederalism is not yet a fully developed concept or programme. Rather, we are in a discussion process that has been inspired, among other things, by a) the developments of the past years in Kurdistan, especially the revolutionary process in Rojava, the increased participation and participation of internationalists in this process as well as the reflections of the struggle in Kurdistan in other parts of the world and b) the character of our age, the effects on women and in this context the possibilities and historical necessity to realize the women's revolution. In addition there are internal developments of the women's liberation movement in Kurdistan on ideological, organizational, structural, political and social level like Jineoloji, Co-Chairpersonship, confederal organization of the women's movement. For example, the largest umbrella organization of Kurdish women had renamed itself from KJB (Koma Jinên Bilind – High Council of Women) to KJK (Komalên Jinên Kurdistanê – Communities of Women from Kurdistan) at its extraordinary general assembly in spring 2014. This was not only a change of name, but a restructuring according to democratic confederalism as conceptualized by Abdullah Öcalan. Accordingly, the KJK is not only the largest umbrella organization of the Kurdish women's movement, but also a confederal structure. In other words, it is organised in a confederal way.

Learning democracy

Democratic Confederalism is a political project of a transnational grassroots democracy in fundamental critique of the nation state. Democratic confederalism is thus the political alternative of democratic modernity to the nation-state of capitalist modernity. Öcalan describes its function and role in the third volume (“Sociology of Freedom”) of his five-volume Manifesto of Democratic Civilization – freely translated – as follows: “Democratic Confederalism is the fundamental political form of democratic modernity. It expresses a vital role in the reconstruction work and is the most appropriate democratic policy instrument for the formation of solutions. Democratic Confederalism presents the alternative of the democratic nation as the main instrument for solving ethnic, religious, urban, local, regional and national problems, the starting point of which is the monolithic, homogeneous, monochromatic fascist social model of capitalist modernity created by the nation state. In the democratic nation, every ethnicity, every religion, every city, every local, regional and national reality has the right to participate with its own identity and democratic federal structure”.

Democratic confederalism as a structure, on the other hand, is also functional because it helps to dismantle power and domination and to learn democracy. Vertical and horizontal directions converge here. Countless entities form an organizational unit, while at the same time maintaining their autonomy and autonomy internally. They are not organized hierarchically, but represent an inverted pyramid in the vertical dimension. Horizontally, they are organized together with other entities either geographically or according to their content. In practice this means, for example, that a local ecology group organises itself confederately with ecology groups in other places, which are encompassed by a confederal structure, but at the same time is also organised on a local level with women’s groups, municipalities, cooperatives, elementary schools, youth groups etc. in councils. This practice of self-determination and self-administration serves to strengthen democratic politics, which Öcalan sees as a unity of collective thinking, discussion and decision-making. For him, politics is the opposite of state administration. According to Öcalan, the state is the denial of political society. Politics is the center of finding solutions to social problems. Democracy, on the other hand, requires the political society in order to exist. The political society, on the other hand, is the society that realizes its freedom by gaining power of thought, determination and action in essential aspects of life. Societies that do not politicize themselves within this framework can neither determine their fate nor determine themselves nor democratize themselves. There is therefore an inseparable link between politics, freedom and democracy. They can only exist together.

On the basis of this definition, democratic world women’s confederalism represents a way of building a political system of world-women, the primary aim of which is to find solutions to all issues affecting women by collectively strengthening their power of thought, determination and action. This means that world women’s confederalism would be a political structure in which organized women would think together about patriarchal attacks and possibilities for the realization of women’s liberation, would engage in theoretical-intellectual production, make observations, work out solutions, make and implement joint decisions. It is not a question of forming a new common umbrella organisation or an international women’s organisation. What is needed is a transnational grassroots democracy of women, based on a perfect balance between local and global as well as partial and universal. This is different from a network, a federation or a union, for example. But it would also not be just a loose entity that comes together from

time to time, discusses and diverges again. Rather, we need a mechanism by which the intellectual and practical potential of world women can take concrete shape at the global level and an effective counterforce to patriarchy can emerge. In doing so, we must go beyond everything that has existed so far, because we are in a historical phase. Never before in the 5000-year history of the Patriarchate has the women's liberation struggle taken on such a strategic character, has the possibility of realizing the women's revolution been so great.

We are at a time when the dilemma between light and darkness, justice and injustice, liberation and slavery is particularly evident in the exploitation of women, but also in their increased insistence on their freedom. That is why no century has been as favourable as the 21st to the realization of women's freedom.

The confrontation with internationalism in the 21st century is the other thrust of the idea of women's confederalism. The women's liberation movement in Kurdistan has been internationalist from the beginning, because it is socialist. The Kurdish freedom movement under the leadership of the PKK as well. Already its founding declaration of 1978 ended with the words "Long live independence and proletarian internationalism". In his political-ideological analyses from the late 1980s and early 1990s, Abdullah Öcalan increasingly dealt with socialism and in this context also with (proletarian) internationalism, which he calls the main principle. In an analysis¹ of January 1990, he describes the dialectic of internationalism in the PKK as follows: "As we advance the Kurdish revolution as a national liberation movement, we add the most essential internationalist content to it. We make our own revolution a mainstay of Turkey's revolution on the one hand, and a stable pillar of national and democratic liberation developments in the Middle East on the other. We maintain a position from which the democratic revolution and socialism in Turkey can draw strength, and at the same time we are a support that gives strength to a multitude of democratic and national developments of smaller peoples. What does that mean? That we provide a meaningful response to democratic developments and socialism in the world within our framework. In this context, the socialism realized in the PKK is the best answer to the self-renewal efforts of socialism".

The question of a new internationalism is not new

From the 1990s onwards, Öcalan was increasingly concerned with the reasons for the end of real socialism, which then led to a paradigm shift in the PKK after the turn of the century. In doing so, he always included the idea and practice of internationalism. For example, in an analysis of May 1, 1993² he addresses the dead ends with which socialism is confronted at the end of the 20th century. In his opinion, one of the main problems is that the most important questions of our time are still being examined with 19th century analyses. However, the class understanding must be changed because the working class in the form defined in the Communist Manifesto, for example, no longer exists and capitalism is no longer satisfied with the exploitation of a class in the narrow sense. This age has passed. Of course, this kind of exploitation still exists, but it is more all-encompassing today because the whole society is trapped. Capitalism had developed methods of robbery and oppression that could not be compared to the 19th century. In the same analysis, Öcalan proposes a new International and declares a reconceptualization of socialist

¹ "Gerçekleşen Sosyalizmin Dönüm Noktasında Yeni Sosyalizm Arayışları Gelişir"

² Sosyalizmde İsrar İnsan Olmakta İsrardır, Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1998

ideology necessary. In the next step, the socialist ideology should take the form of a program and then reorganize itself and take action.

The question of a new internationalism is not new. Many socialist thinkers have dealt with this question in the last 20-30 years. This includes Murray Bookchin, who in 1993 wrote an essay entitled “A New Internationalism”: “From the perspective of the end of the 20th century, we must certainly demand more than internationalism demanded in the 19th century. We need to build a moral of mutuality in which cultural differences on all sides serve to advance the very unity of humanity – in short, a new mosaic of vibrant cultures that enrich people’s relationships and support their progress, rather than fragmenting and dividing them into new ‘nationalities’ and a growing number of nation-states”.

For the Kurdish women’s movement, the question of a new internationalism in the 21st century has much to do with the character of our time from a women’s perspective. For it finds that in this first quarter of the 21st century the women’s issue is increasingly coming to the foreground as the main social conflict. Abdullah Öcalan had declared on World Women’s Day 1998: “Just as the 19th century was the era of the bourgeois parties and the 20th century was the era of the workers’ parties, the 21st century will be the era of the parties that put the women’s issue at their centre. How right Öcalan had at the end of the 20th century is becoming increasingly clear. Not only in the developments set in motion under the leading role of the women’s movement in Kurdistan (such as women’s self-defence and the struggle against the IS, equal participation and representation in the political field, the principle of co-presidency), but also in the growing women’s struggle for freedom, equality, justice, dignity and peace worldwide. Perhaps never before have so many women taken to the streets for their rights as today. Perhaps never before in history have so many women openly expressed their rejection of the ruling patriarchal, capitalist system. Especially the global North, which lost a lot of women’s organization in the course of liberalization in the 90s, is in a phase of re-strengthening. This year’s women’s strikes in Europe and, for example, the women’s marches in the USA, as well as campaigns such as #MeToo or #TimesUp, are proof of this. Among the women of the world, gender awareness is becoming stronger as the potential for conflict increases. This opens up new possibilities for the realization of women’s liberation. At the same time, as organized women’s movements, we are confronted with a great responsibility that stems from a historical necessity. The Kurdish women’s movement is convinced that the 21st century will be the century of women’s revolution. This process has already begun, as can be clearly seen in Rojava. But the patriarchal system tries by all means to stop this historical process. The concentration of misogynistic attacks worldwide bears witness to this. That is why it is imperative that women worldwide fight together and thus concentrate their collective strength. For only together can we wage an effective struggle against patriarchy and thus all forms of exploitation and oppression. The hegemonic world system is strongly organized in itself. In order to overcome it, we must be at least as strongly organized – if not stronger.

Really fighting together

How can we organized women as potential main subjects of the revolution of the 21st century master this now? In the past decades there have been many attempts to form networks of women’s organizations through which the common struggle can be organized and conducted. However, we see that the results do not correspond to the demands and necessities of our time.

Perhaps this is also due to the fact that insufficient in-depth analyses have been made of the obstacles that lay in front of us. What prevents us from organising and fighting together? Which political, social, cultural, ideological, practical, financial, etc.? Obstacles exist and how can we remove them? These are by no means insignificant points. Democratic confederalism could also be a possible solution here, since it is based on an optimum balance between local and global and at the same time promotes a democratic policy as a structure. This is, after all, urgently necessary for joint struggles. For only if it is possible to overcome internal power and domination relationships and hierarchies can the common struggle be advanced.

A fundamental pillar of the principle of internationalism is international solidarity. According to the Marxist definition, international solidarity is also about mutual support. The importance of mutual support between revolutionary movements, women's liberation movements, left-wing socialist parties, anti-capitalist organizations, people's liberation movements, etc. is beyond discussion. But we also think that we have to move more in the direction of common struggle. Mutual support within the framework of international solidarity is of course urgently needed. But it is not enough. Rather, we must find ways of fighting together and defending each other. Support is one thing, defence another. Defence goes one step further, is more radical in nature. You stand next to each other when it comes to support. When I defend someone, I put myself between them and the attacker if necessary. That is a different quality. And that is why we think that also for women a re-evaluation of the principle and also of the concept of international solidarity is necessary. Democratic world women's confederalism also stands for this.

We are confronted with changing circumstances and needs. We recognise that we must go a step further in order to meet these demands and thus change our age. We firmly believe that we are in a historical time and that only we as women can set in motion a revolution that can effectively combat all forms of exploitation and oppression. The women's issue is at the heart of all social issues. This reality is being recognised more and more. More and more, the gender and class consciousness of women worldwide is strengthening. We must use this great opportunity to realise the women's revolution. But for this we also have to deal with forms of joint organisation and resistance. As the women's liberation movement of Kurdistan we would like to fulfil our role and responsibility by trying to put our ideological, theoretical, political and practical experiences at the service of all our sisters. Therefore we discuss the idea of a democratic world women's confederalism both as a solution and as a way to an effective, radical, democratic common struggle of world women against patriarchy. We want to open this discussion, which we have started internally, as far as possible. Because this is also of great importance: that we discuss, find solutions, take decisions and take action together. Only then can we really fight together.

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