

# **Mutual aid and solidarity against Covid-19**

**Interviews with political organizers**

Komun Academy

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The world is currently experiencing an extraordinary crisis as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Around the world, people on the ground have been organizing themselves in solidarity with each other from the beginning. In these efforts, they often struggle against the damage done by the neoliberal state. Through mutual aid, collective organizing and feminist care practices, they show us that the established status quo is not our fate, but in fact, at the heart of all crises experienced in the world today – from health crises to ecological catastrophe, domestic violence to war, worker's exploitation to racism and xenophobia.

Komun Academy has interviewed different collectives and their response to the pandemic. In this first part of the series, we present the answers provided from groups in Euskal Herria (Basque Country), Catalonia and Sweden.

## **Askapena – Euskal Herriko erakunde internazionalista (Basque Country Internationalist Organization)**

*Can you please describe your activities since the beginning of the spread of the virus?*

Members of the organization participate in the popular movement, so they are taking part in the mutual aid networks that are emerging. Moreover as an organization we are preparing a reading in the sense of warning of the new capitalist attack and claiming the freedom of the peoples of the world as the only way out. Put life in the center. In addition, the attitude of Cuba is being emphasized by sending doctors as an example of internationalist solidarity.

*Is your work based on a specific perspective or principle?*

The internationalist solidarity is our basic principle. Always bearing in mind that the first step should be taken in Euskal Herria, the liberation of Euskal Herria is the best contribution we can make to the rest of the world. Only in this way can we fully develop internationalist solidarity. Thus, it is necessary to involve ourselves in the dynamics that lead us to social liberation and as a people.

*People have pointed out that states will use the pandemic as an occasion to deprive people of fundamental rights and liberties for authoritarian purposes. What do you think about different states' response to the pandemic, in particular about the increase of state powers?*

States will further centralize their power and further militarize our lives. They must do so, because it is the only way for capitalism to adapt to new circumstances. So, along with the greater poverty and precarization of the people, repression will be greater to avoid any protest and self-organization by the popular sectors.

*How do you interpret the increase of solidarity or mutual aid-based actions in different parts of the world?*

They are an opportunity to develop popular power. It is a way for people to equip themselves with instruments of horizontal and democratic organization. That is why it is very important that the revolutionary sectors involve us in these networks and be able to do a pedagogical work with the people. To do so through the example of the militants and through the implementation of real alternatives beyond the established capitalist power.

*What other solidarity/mutual aid activities in your city/region or around the world inspire you?*

As an organization we have as one of the references the Democratic Confederation, the struggles that took place in Greece creating a great self-managed network, MST of Brazil... In Euskal

Herria there is a great organizational trajectory: popular festivities, gaztetxes, youth assemblies, neighborhood associations...what is serving as help these days.

## **Carla Fuentes, trade unionist, Catalonia**

*Can you please describe your activities since the beginning of the spread of the virus?*

In and around Barcelona, many are the networks of mutual support that have been created these days. The support groups are functioning in a telematic way, in order to be able to answer all the questions and needs. In my case, from a labor union, different commissions have been created, many are the workers who have doubts about their new working conditions or their rights (I remember that in the Spanish State different laws have been approved that facilitate the temporary massive dismissal, the telemarketing, etc...) so we are facing a new labor panorama. Another of the commissions created in a more ideological line is that of diffusion; these days the authoritarian and fascist discourse has increased, with a great exaltation of the police forces and state control, it is our duty that this discourse does not go far, to create communities where people talk to their neighbors and not to the police.

At the moment, aid is quite centralized in the town halls but we believe that these will also collapse in the next few days, so at the local (village) level we are organizing ourselves into commissions where analysis, actions and propaganda are carried out to create a strong network for the population.

*Is your work based on a specific perspective or principle?*

Yes, the expectation is to create community based on self-organization, the population has to understand that only with the help of the neighbors can we be stronger and that it is necessary to create community to survive in this world. Creating strong communities based on self-organization is the beginning of changing the system.

*People have pointed out that states will use the pandemic as an occasion to deprive people of fundamental rights and liberties for authoritarian purposes. What do you think about different states' response to the pandemic, in particular about the increase of state powers?*

Yes, in the Spanish State from the moment the alerts were put out the rights have been minimized. Citizens are becoming police officers, publicly pointing out those who dare to leave their homes, and applauding the police action even though it is disproportionate, people to leave their homes have to look for an excuse and they start to fear that the police will ask you where you are going, you need to carry a certificate of responsibility, we believe that after the pandemic this state will have a very strong mental impact, and probably many rights will be cut, as it could be that of the demonstration. Some citizens have stopped using common sense to base their activity on rules, and since they don't dare to disobey, they blame those who do and label them as irresponsible.

On the other hand, this crisis will not only have a great effect on the social level, but also on the economic level; the economic situation for the Spanish State could be worse than in 2008. Now, most companies have carried out massive and rapid layoffs, but we will see how many of them will later join the companies and under what conditions. The State is protecting above all the entrepreneurs.

At the same time, the police presence has no origin, they are everywhere, besides chasing people by putting "order" in the queues of the supermarkets, for example, so the legitimacy of the

State has increased. In the Spanish state, the voices of the extreme right reproach the state for not “having closed Madrid” days ago, and the fact that the leftist politicians (many of them infected by the virus) went to the demonstration on March 8 and called for assistance as those responsible for this crisis, since they have condemned the population for wanting to stop machismo (which for them does not exist).

*How do you interpret the increase of solidarity or mutual aid-based actions in different parts of the world?*

Honestly, we are not analyzing much the activities in other parts of the world, we are quite focused on the Spanish State.

*What other solidarity/mutual aid activities in your city/region or around the world inspire you?*

Young people (in theory, the lowest risk group) are putting themselves at the service of the community, and this is very inspiring. Support networks are being created for abused women, let's not forget that now many will have to stop 24h with their abuser, and there is a very high recognition of those workers who continue their activity for the common good, such as doctors, supermarket clerks, etc. In some towns in Catalonia, people are organising how to make medical equipment such as masks, and they want to help.

*What would you like to say to others at the moment?*

I'd like to say that this is a good time to reflect, what kind of lives do we have that scare us so much about death? Why this panic? Why don't we panic when we see bombs falling or when our governments throw bombs at innocent people? Why does a “natural” death scare us so much now? Are we living in a correct way and on what principles?

Only a life in harmony with ourselves, with our community and with nature will save us, only a life where we are weaving nets, creating a strong and self-organized community will save us. Only a life where we know we are doing the impossible to improve it will leave us alone in the face of catastrophe. Only the people can save the people.

## **Rojavakommittéerna Malmö, a working group within Allt Åt Alla Malmö**

Our response have been grounded alot in the tenets of Kurdish Freedom movements' New Paradigm. The first thing we did, together with the rest of Allt Åt Alla Malmö was to analyze where the state was failing in this crisis and where we, as an movement could fill these cracks left by the state. We focused primarily on building a communal “self defence” against the spread of the virus, with it's base in the local community. We could see that the state and the municipalities message was to stay at home if you showed symptoms or if you where a part of the risk groups, but without providing any tools to help these isolated people in their daily life.

Allt Åt Alla Malmö's first initiative was thus a facebook group called “Granne Till Granne” (“Neighbour to Neighbour”) that solely focused on helping people in isolation with practical things like grocery shopping. Since it's launch on the 13<sup>th</sup> of march the group has grown to well over 1600 volunteers. Other than grocery shopping the group have also participated in getting, and giving out ~300 boxes of bread to people in need, but also collecting 6300 pieces of plastic film and with these helped in the manufacturing of protective visors for people working in the hospitals.

At the same time as we are trying to fill the cracks left by the state we have also heavily criticised what we see as the root cause of the problems: the political system that values money

and spending cuts over peoples health and lives. We see the need for these two to exist in tandem; to criticise but to also show alternatives through praxis. By being relevant in the community and by offering collective tools for solving problems in it, our views about the root cause of the problems and visions of alternatives is also being listened to by wider audiences.

These times are a kind of “opening up” of the status quo where we very clearly can see that different actors have taken the space left to push the society in either direction. Fascists are talking about helping “our people” first, some nation states, like the UK are trying to sneak past permanent limitations of civil liberties, like right to assembly and very invasive surveillance measures. But at the same time we see wide spread critique against the nation states themselves. Against the capitalist market with its “just in time”-logic failing in handling the crisis, against individualism and against hate towards neighbours. We can see a seed of collectivism, of human value over money and the solidarity found in affinity of the local community strengthening. How this tough times plays out and how the story gets written when it is finished is still in the hands of us all.

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