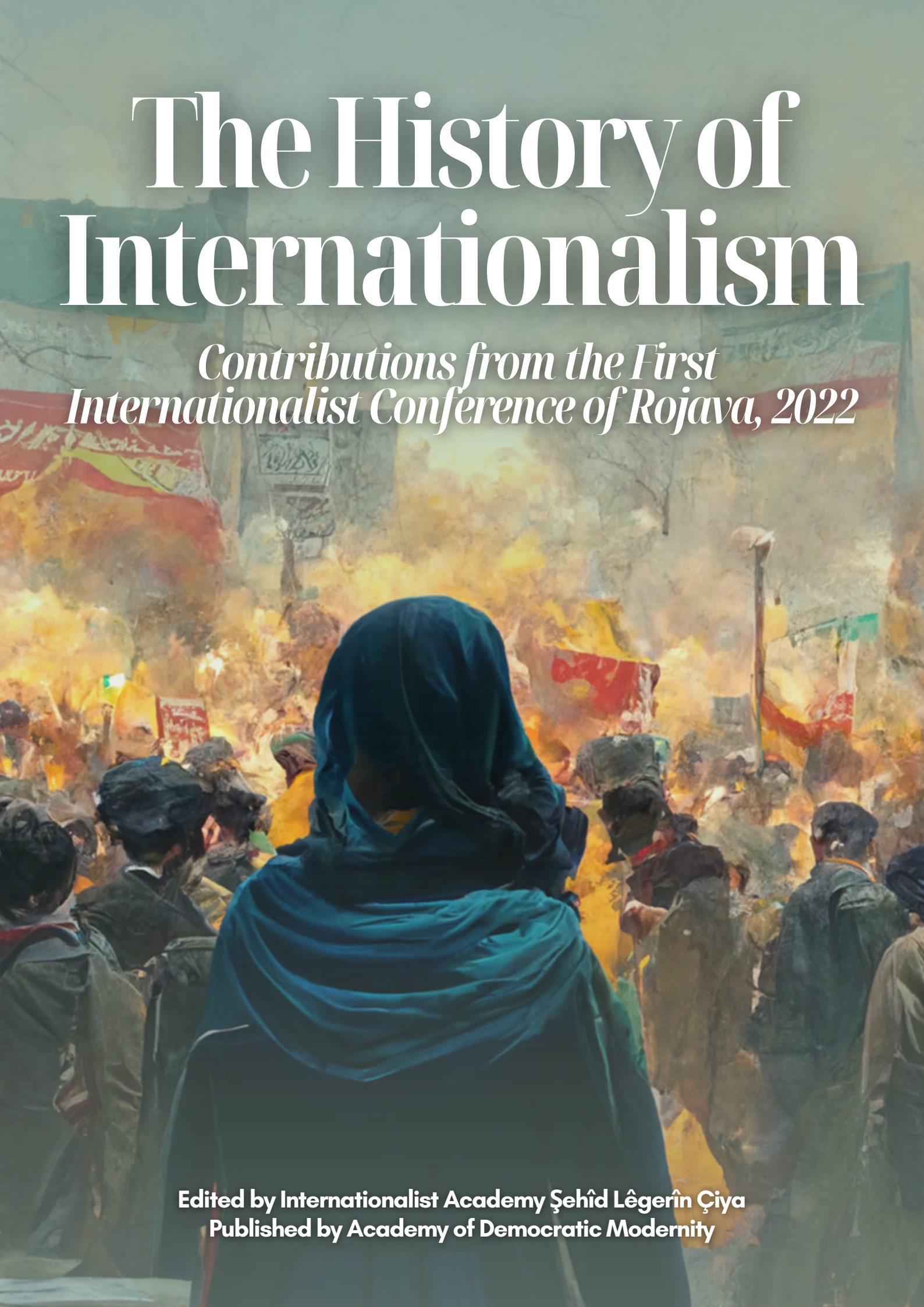
The History of Internationalism

Contributions from the First Internationalist Conference of Rojava, 2022



Edited by Internationalist Academy Şehîd Lêgerîn Çiya
Published by Academy of Democratic Modernity

This brochure is online:
https://democraticmodernity.com/

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Published in March 2026

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Introduction

This is a compilation of the contributions from the First Internationalist Conference of Rojava (North and East Syria) in 2022, which was dedicated to Abdullah Öcalan and the internationalist martyrs who fell in the struggle for a free life. Over the course of the multi-day conference, seminars on the history of internationalism worldwide were held, and these have been summarised in this brochure for all freedom-seeking internationalists. The lectures offer a comprehensive overview of various stages of internationalism, starting with the historical experiences of the three Internationals, through to anti-colonial struggles, the Spanish Revolution, the 1968 movement, and Democratic Confederalism as a perspective for internationalism and women's liberation in the 21st century. The 20th century was marked by many of these struggles, which continue to influence resistance and revolutions in the 21st century, and whose legacy we are all following. The hope of that time—that revolution would come at any moment—and the ways and means of organising the masses still give us hope and energy today to carry out a worldwide revolution against the capitalist-patriarchal system. Although this hope is repeatedly attacked by the ruling hegemonic powers, the experience of 50 years of struggle by the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and more than 10 years of revolution in North and East Syria remains a great source of inspiration and hope worldwide. We are living in historic times, and we must see our own role and responsibility as significant, for it is up to us to spread the sparks of this revolution and let them ignite into a fire.

An important starting point is to look at history and build upon it. With his call for "Peace and a Democratic Society" in February 2025, Abdullah Öcalan started a new era, one in which the aim is to more deeply understand the mistakes of real-socialism and to build democratic modernity within the framework of internationalism. In the defence writings he wrote on the prison island of Imrali, he analyses the history of humanity and democratic civilisation, opening up new perspectives. From the very beginning, Abdullah Öcalan has referred to national liberation movements and revolutions around the world, using them as a foundation. It was not least the experiences of the left in Turkey that paved the way for organisation and led to the formation of an internationalist movement from the outset. In his analyses, he also critiques the mistakes and shortcomings of anti-systemic forces, who have not managed to free themselves from the state's power apparatus. One of his main criticisms is that women's liberation must be at the centre of socialist struggles. In his letter to all women worldwide, dated 8 March 2025, he writes:

"As long as the patriarchal culture deeply rooted in our new society is not shattered—as Marxism also proves—the success of socialism will remain impossible. The road to socialism is led through women's liberation: without women's freedom, there is neither true socialism nor socialist people, and without democracy, this road cannot be travelled."

To build on this democratic history and the critiques of Abdullah Öcalan, it is now up to us to read and discuss the history of internationalism and to fight together. Today in Kurdistan, in the heart of the Middle East, in the land of Mesopotamia, the hope of freedom is alive once again and it will find its representation in terms of ideas, philosophy, ideology and spirituality in a great revolution. The internationalist character of the struggle in Kurdistan is as follows: whatever happens in Kurdistan, it will have a great impact on the Middle East. What happens in the Middle East will have a great impact on the whole world. In other words, the success of the Kurdistan revolution will create great opportunities for a democratic Middle East and from there it will be a response and example to the whole world, to the oppressed people and women and youth who are looking for freedom.
We can create a life based on socialist values and a struggle for a free life away from the state, power and violence. The hope of building a real alternative, a different way of thinking is the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan.

Preparation committee of the First Internationalist Conference of Rojava, December 2025

1. What is internationalism?

Internationlism in Rojava

Being here in Rojava today, we recognise the internationalist spirit fuelling this revolution. We ask: What lessons can we draw from this history? What aspects give us strength, and which parts require re-evaluation due to past tragedies? Analysing both our achievements and mistakes is essential. In Kurdistan, this is not the only conversation on internationalism. Since the emergence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) in the 1970s through to the 1990s, the topic of internationalism and revolutions worldwide—such as the October Revolution, anti-colonial struggles, and anti-fascist movements—has been extensively debated within the movement. These movements have inspired the revolution in Kurdistan. Discussions on the global struggle for justice have been integral to our education, research, and exchanges.

Here, in a place marked by wars and revolution, we live out the spirit of internationalism. Our presence, coming from different places around the globe, in itself is an internationalist struggle, a testament to the history of international solidarity. For this reason, the lessons we can draw from Kurdistan's own struggle are rich enough to help us understand where we stand and how we can move forward. In the end, these upcoming seminars over the next two days offer a glimpse into some threads of discussion within the movement—conversations between comrades from around the globe and across various fields of work on the enduring significance of internationalism.

Over the years of internationalist work in Rojava, we have often asked the question, "What do you think or feel when you hear the word internationalism?" The diversity of responses reflect our varied backgrounds —cultural, economic, ideological—but also underscores the unity in diversity that internationalism represents. Differences in perspective should not divide us; instead, these perspectives should form the basis of our shared struggle against common oppressions. Our goal is to establish a common understanding of what we are fighting for.

In these discussions, a recurring theme has been the role of empathy—our ability to connect with and understand each other—as fundamental to internationalism. This empathetic approach helps break down the walls that divide us, fostering solidarity. It's not just a matter of politics or strategy; it's about feeling deeply for those beside us. This sense of comradeship strengthens revolutionary militancy, making it more than just a shared ideology, but a shared purpose and feeling.

International solidarity naturally brings diverse opinions. What does support entail? When and where should participation in international struggles occur? Does solidarity mean joining struggles beyond one's own region, or focusing on change locally? Should we contribute where it is most needed, or only within our own borders? These are ongoing questions, but at their core, they highlight the need for an internationalism that does not replicate oppression but seeks to dismantle it. Our goal is a unity that is true to its revolutionary principles and grounded in genuine solidarity and shared struggle.

These are essential questions to consider when discussing internationalism. It's easy to make this topic complex, intellectual, even academic, to the point where it becomes inaccessible.

What we need to feel and do is straightforward. Everyone here may have come for different reasons, but we are united by a common goal: to defend the revolution in Kurdistan, to learn from it, and to carry its spirit—its multiple dimensions—across the world, whether to the Middle East, Abya Yala, Europe, or elsewhere. We seek to strengthen our unity and effectiveness with other struggling movements worldwide to challenge and change capitalist modernity, ultimately confronting the enemies of humanity.

History and legacy of internationalism: The path we are walking on

Internationalism, while often felt as a powerful emotion expressed in our interactions, is deeply linked to the actions we take daily. Yet, it cannot be fully realised without an organised, coordinated, revolutionary strategy to counter the hegemonic capitalist system. We must develop the resilience and strength to stand against a global landscape controlled by imperialist powers that make decisions affecting people worldwide. These powers command technologies, armies, and wealth, while people across the globe suffer from poverty, hunger, and oppression. Without organisation, we remain weak, in standing against forces that systematically oppress us. Internationalism, therefore, requires confronting our shared reality and enabling ourselves to resist —not just to survive, but to achieve victory, dismantling the systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and fascism.

Historically, the concept of internationalism emerged in opposition to the rise of nationalism, as capitalist modernity established itself as a dominant global system, with the nation-state as a tool of control. While we often discuss internationalism as a phenomenon of the past 150 to 200 years, the struggle of humanity stretches back thousands of years—women, slaves, and oppressed peoples have always fought against centralised, exploitative systems. As Abdullah Öcalan has noted, the practice of Confederalism has long existed as a way of social self-organisation. Confederations of people, from different nations, cultures and identities, coming together and organising themselves, on the basis of the principle of "unity in diversity", has been present in history, in many different geographies. Internationalism, born from the rise of capitalism, opposes that system globally. Yet the values beneath it—unity, solidarity, and the collective fight for human dignity—are as old as human society itself, rooted in values established over thousands of years.

To understand the foundations of internationalism, it is helpful to see it as a centuries-old struggle for freedom and liberation—a persistent reality of humanity that has resisted colonisation in all its forms. In this sense, internationalism can be traced much further back than 200 years. However, as a concept it largely emerged from the historical shifts following the French Revolution of 1789. These shifts led to the development of socialism, radical democracy, feminism, women's liberation, and the principle that all people have the right to shape their own way of life. This right is a core value of internationalism.

Around this concept of internationalism, we find terms like proletarian internationalism, the unity of the oppressed, and the solidarity of peoples. The internationalist struggle is often associated with the famous slogan from the Communist Manifesto: "Workers of the world, unite!" This call opposes the divisive forces of nationalism and national borders. Yet, from our perspective today, we see the need for a broader unity beyond workers alone. Women's struggles, communal values, and collective resistance against state power, capitalism, and oppression have roots that run deep through history.

Many frameworks exist for analysing our society, but as we see the rise of international movements, the call to unite struggle across borders grows stronger. Che Guevara's call to "create one, two, three Vietnams" resonates in a world where poverty, militarised state power, ecological destruction, and slavery persist. Freedom for some is not true freedom at all; only when we dismantle capitalist modernity in its entirety and foster real change—grounded in ecology, radical grassroots democracy, and women's liberation—can we begin to feel a sense of satisfaction. This goal demands much more work and united effort from all of us until it is achieved.

In a 2014 letter, Abdullah Öcalan provided a range of perspectives, particularly on the internationalist struggle as it relates to the Kurdish revolution. One of these perspectives was the need to revive the spirit of the October Revolution and for Rojava to become a symbol of resistance, akin to Palestine in the 1970s and 1980s—a time when Palestine served as a central point for various internationalist movements worldwide. This raises the essential question: have we achieved these objectives, and if not, how do we move towards them?

The idea of reviving the October Revolution evokes diverse viewpoints. However, there is a consensus that the revolution represented a significant shift in the Soviet Union and served as a source of inspiration for people and revolutionaries worldwide. During a time of widespread hopelessness after the devastation of World War I and the disintegration of the Second International into nationalist propaganda and war mobilisation, the October Revolution became a beacon of hope. It called for the rejection of reformism and the continuation of revolutionary struggle.

The long-term outcomes are another matter, but the revolution's core meaning remains historically significant: revolution is a continuous process, not a single event. A single action or change does not fulfil the revolutionary goal; sustained momentum is required. Similar to the October Revolution, which followed the February Revolution that overthrew the Tsarist regime, the next step in Russia was to transfer power to the people.

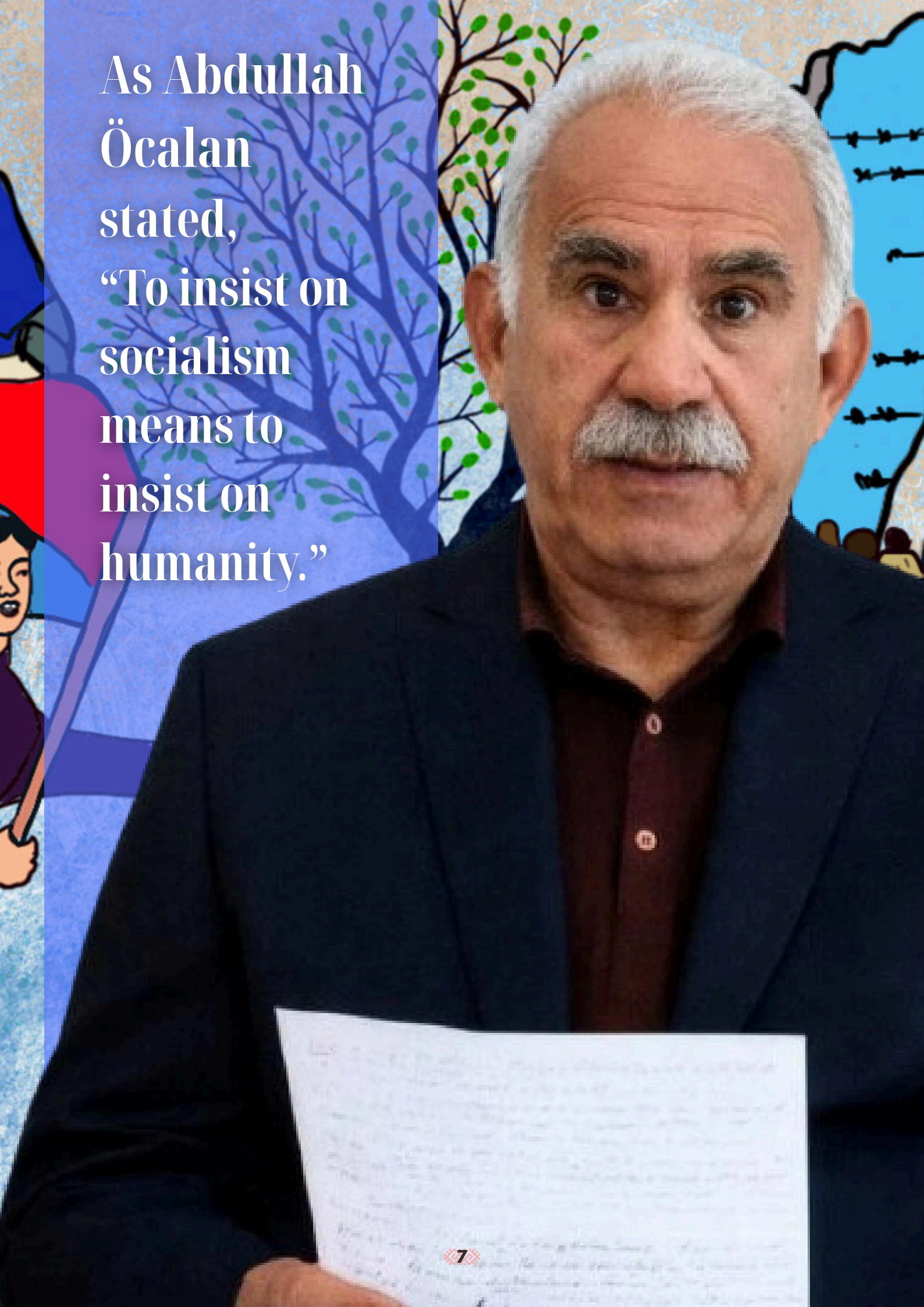
Palestine also played a pivotal role for numerous movements worldwide in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. For the PKK and the Kurdish struggle, Palestine provided a space to organise, restructure, and receive essential training, particularly in armed and guerrilla tactics. When considering Rojava's potential to play the role that Palestine historically played, it's important to understand the historical context. Rojava's circumstances differ from those of the October Revolution and Palestine in past decades. Every struggle is unique and shaped by its time and setting.

Yet in essence, Rojava has created a place where we can unite, struggle, and actively engage in revolutionary action. Here, we are immersed in the principles of Democratic Nation in North and East Syria, defending the revolution against external aggression. While we will examine the challenges and limitations of internationalism in Rojava, we must also recognise that some goals have indeed been reached, enabling gatherings like this conference. We have not yet achieved all our aims, but this only reinforces our resolution to struggle for the implementation of our principles everywhere.

The revolution’s past decade offers us invaluable lessons and inspiration. These ten years reflect an array of internationalist ideas in practice, from symbolic solidarity—through ideological, material, and symbolic support—to the direct action of internationalists who stood against Turkey, ISIS, and other fascist forces, protecting the revolution on the front lines.

In this, we have rekindled the spirit of the international brigades from the 1930s. Though Spain’s circumstances were different, the essence remains unchanged, and this spirit is what we aim to reinforce at moments like the Internationalist Conference in 2022. Supporting Rojava’s struggle does not imply abandoning our own struggles at home; rather, it is about joining a shared, inherently internationalist fight. A defeat in Kurdistan would be a profound setback for movements across Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq, the broader Middle East and the world. Conversely, a victory here would strike a powerful blow against occupation and fascism, fostering democratisation in the Middle East and catalysing revolutionary possibilities globally.

Ultimately, internationalism is not merely a theory; it is the drive to take action, a unity forged in effort and sacrifice, not just in words. This is the legacy of the comrades whose path we aim to continue. We must now define the tasks before us in our internationalist struggle. While there are countless perspectives for advancing our global movements, here in Rojava, the immediate mission is to resist Turkish fascism, support the revolution, fight for Abdullah Öcalan’s freedom, and spread the revolution’s ideas worldwide.


As Abdullah Öcalan stated, “To insist on socialism means to insist on humanity.”

2. Historical Experiences of the three Internationals

The experiences of the Internationals have deeply influenced revolutionary movements and struggles around the world. This section gives a brief overview of what happened during the time of the three Internationals, showing how each one learned from the previous and how they continue to offer important lessons for us today. These moments in the history of the fight for freedom are significant for many reasons. When we look at them now, we see not only positive developments and revolutionary progress but also many challenges, mistakes, and shortcomings—ideologically, theoretically, and practically. While we may not all agree on how to assess these experiences, they remain an essential part of our shared history as socialists, as revolutionaries, and as freedom fighters. In this sense, the legacy of the three Internationals is undeniably a key part of the historical struggle for freedom.

During this period of international organisation for socialism, one decisive moment was the publication of the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels in 1848, with its famous call, "Workers of the world, unite!" This slogan, along with the analysis of capitalism in the manifesto, helped spread the idea of proletarian internationalism. As these ideas took shape, workers' movements across different regions—particularly in Europe—began to organise, asking how they could unite their struggles. They questioned how workers should organise within their countries, how they could collaborate across borders, and how to address the different conditions in each country. Despite national differences, they sought common ground to bring their movements together. While capitalism organised itself around national interests, it also created strong alliances and conflicts between different national bourgeoisie forces.

The First International

Amid these discussions, the International Workingmen's Association—known as the First International—was founded in London in 1864. Although there were many ideological challenges and divisions within the First International, its greatest achievement was the establishment of coordinated solidarity among workers' movements for the first time. When socialist organisations or workers' movements organised strikes or protests, whether in factories or rural areas, they were no longer isolated but supported by an international network that helped sustain their struggles and make them stronger.

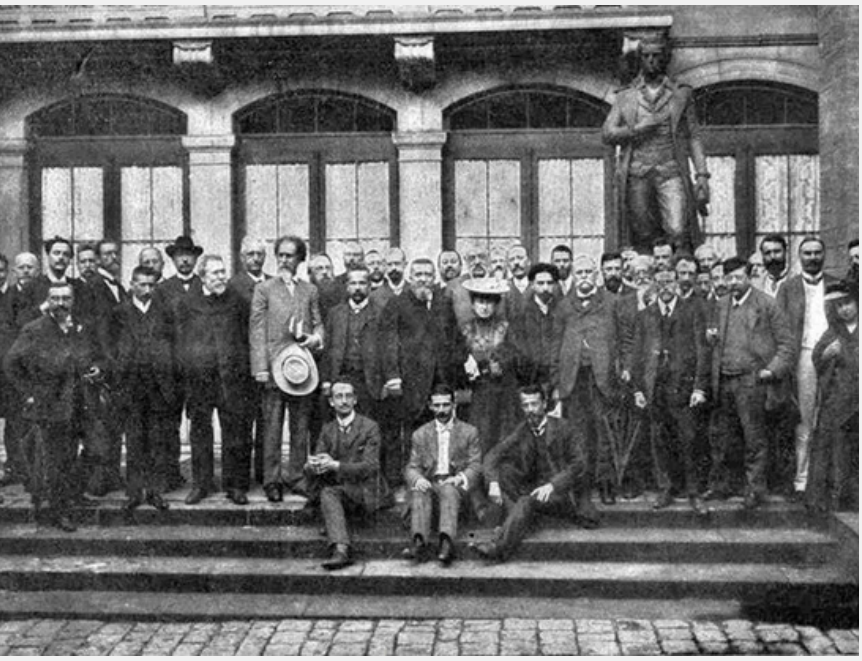
In its early years, the First International did more than just talk about the need for internationalism and unity among workers. It succeeded, at least on a small scale, in creating coordinated solidarity between different movements. Today, the First International is often remembered for the conflicts and contradictions that arose within it. These tensions primarily developed between three main factions: those around Proudhon, Bakunin, and Marx. The experience of the Paris Commune further intensified the conflict, especially between Marxists and Anarchists. Central to the debate were questions about the role of centralism versus de-centralism, and whether revolution should aim to seize state power or reject it entirely. These issues had already been discussed before the Paris Commune, but the event brought them into sharper focus.

Despite efforts to maintain unity, the differing views on these core questions, especially after the Paris Commune, led to the gradual decline of the First International. The final blow came after a subsequent conference where anarchists were barred from voting, prompting them to leave the organisation and form their own alternative International. This new group, known as "the Anarchist International of St. Imier" or otherwise known as the "Anti-Authoritarian International," was founded in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland in 1872. It also organised itself under the name International Workers Association. For a time, there were two Internationals bearing the same name —one influenced by Bakunin's anarchist positions, and the other by Marx's views. Neither lasted long, with the First International dissolving in the 1870s and the Anti-Authoritarian International following in the 1880s.

Bakunin's anarchist positions, and the other by Marx's views. Neither lasted long, with the First International dissolving in the 1870s and the Anti-Authoritarian International following in the 1880s.
Following the exclusion of the anarchists from the First International, syndicalists remained active in England, Italy, and France. They represented one of the three main currents (Proudhon, Anarchism, and Marxism) within the broader socialist movement. However, they were unable to unite due to ongoing contradictions, a situation that persisted into the Second International. The socialist and communist movements grappled with significant contradictions during this chaotic period.

Large movements with significant potential existed at that time; however, the support of bourgeois interests by leaders of the First International during the World Wars was seen as the cause of the deaths of many workers.
It's important to note that the conflict between anarchists and communists was exacerbated by external factors, political developments in Europe, and agreements between imperialist forces.

Despite significant contradictions and separation between the factions, the struggle and discussions did not end. The dissolution of the First International was not the end of the process but rather a first step. Although unity could not be maintained, the different groups continued their efforts to organise and build an international movement in their own ways. Consequently, discussions about the necessity of a new International intensified, culminating in the establishment of the Second International in Paris in 1889.



The Second International

In the period leading up to the founding of the Second International, one of the key discussions centred around how the socialist movement should organise itself. One of Marx's main lessons from the Paris Commune was that the working class, the oppressed, should not only organise in loose groups or focus solely on economic struggles but should also form political parties. He argued that workers needed to be organised politically, not just economically. This idea laid the foundation for the creation of the Second International and explains why, both before and after its formation, social democratic and socialist parties began to emerge in many different countries.

A significant issue within the Internationals from the very beginning was the question of women's liberation. During the time of the First International, this topic was often overlooked or outright ignored by many members. Initially, there was even debate over whether women should be allowed to join the International. It took a year or two after the First International's founding for the decision to be made that women could participate and attend council meetings. However, despite occasional discussions about the necessity of women's rights, it remained a concern for only a small number of members. Nevertheless, many women became actively involved in various local sections of the First International during its existence.
By the time of the Second International, there was a noticeable shift. Thanks to the efforts of women within the socialist movement and the growing discussions around women's rights, the topic of women's liberation became more prominent. The need for women to organise and demand their rights was increasingly recognised, and new achievements were made through their struggle.

In general, the Second International represented a continuation of the First but with greater organisational strength and ideological clarity. The Second International succeeded in creating mass workers' organisations thanks to clearer ideological foundations, particularly the influence of Marxism. While the First International was often made up of small groups with differing views on socialism and workers' rights, the Second International was more unified in its commitment to socialism, with Marxism and the ideas of Marx and Engels serving as its guiding principles.

What strategies should be followed? How should these goals be achieved? These were key questions that sparked significant debate within the Second International, which became famous for the conflict between reformist and revolutionary positions. On one side, some groups focused on the need to organise legally within existing systems. They prioritised economic struggles for workers and advocated for political engagement through elections, seeking to gain power through parliaments and introduce gradual change through reforms. On the other side, there were those who opposed this approach, arguing that it misunderstood the true nature of capitalism and the system they were fighting against. They believed that the focus should be on organising workers into a revolutionary force capable of overthrowing the system and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This dispute played out in many countries, but the most notable example occurred in Russia, where it led to the split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Their separation revolved around several issues: whether to prioritise legal organisation and reformism or illegal organisation and revolutionary struggle, and how the party itself should be structured. Should the Social Democratic Party be a loose mass organisation, open to anyone who claimed to be a socialist? Or should it be built around specific principles of organisation and struggle, with each member required to actively participate in committees and take on responsibilities? This debate marked the beginning of the organisational concept later developed by the Bolsheviks—Lenin's theory of the vanguard party, a party of militants and professional revolutionaries. This idea grew out of the discussions and conflicts within the Russian Social Democratic Party.

Similar conflicts unfolded in other countries, with figures like Rosa Luxemburg contributing significant theoretical work on the question of reform versus revolution. Her writings are particularly important in understanding this debate within the broader socialist movement of the time.

Despite all the debates and differing opinions, the Second International managed to maintain its unity until the outbreak of the First World War. What is particularly interesting is that, despite the disagreements over how to conduct the struggle, the ideological stance of the Second International remained quite clear up until the war.

Its dominant position was one of anti-militarism—opposing any war between nation-states and ruling classes, and instead promoting the unity of workers and oppressed classes across national boundaries. This was a widely accepted view within the socialist movement before the war. In both 1907 and again in 1913, just a year before the war began, the Second International firmly declared that if such a war were to break out, the only appropriate response from the socialist movement would be class war. The plan was not to support the mobilisation efforts of the bourgeoisie or fall for nationalist and racist propaganda, but to launch a class war, pitting workers against the ruling classes and governments of the nation-states.

However, when the war actually began, the majority of the social democratic movement abandoned these anti-war positions without discussion, instead joining the nationalist propaganda of their respective states. This led to the dissolution of the Second International. Although there were several attempts to continue it, unity was no longer possible.

Many revolutionaries from various socialist and communist factions, anarchist organisations, and other groups, opposed this betrayal and sought to organise resistance against the war. These efforts were largely unsuccessful until the February and October Revolutions in Russia, which sparked a revolutionary wave across Europe and revived the spirit of opposition to the war.

Despite its eventual collapse, the Second International achieved several important milestones. For example, it declared May 1st as International Workers' Day at the time of its founding. Another major achievement came in 1910, during the Second Socialist Women's Conference, when the decision was made to establish International Women's Day. This led to the first International Women's Day being celebrated in 1911, with millions of women and workers around the world gathering to demand the right to vote and fight for their rights and liberation. Even at the Second International's foundational congress in 1889, Clara Zetkin emphasised the crucial role of women's organisation in the workers' movement. Socialist women held an unofficial first congress in 1896, and between 1907 and 1917, four main women's conferences were organised in Stuttgart, Copenhagen, Bern, and Stockholm.

The Third International

IAs a result of the great betrayal within the Second International and following the success of the October Revolution, discussions about the need for a new International began early on. These discussions culminated in the founding of the Third International in 1919 in Moscow. There were differing views on whether the timing was right or whether the conditions were favourable, particularly between the leadership of the Communist Party in Germany and the Communist Party in Moscow. However, in the end, the Third International—the Communist International—was officially established in 1919.

The Third International differed from its predecessors in several key ways, particularly in its approach to organisation and ideological clarity. Under Lenin's leadership, the concept of a revolutionary vanguard—composed of professional revolutionaries and militants—became central. This was reflected in the adoption of the organisational model of democratic centralism, which structured the revolutionary movement with greater discipline and unity.

Another significant shift was in its geographic focus. While the earlier Internationals concentrated primarily on Europe, North America, and Russia, the Third International began to direct its attention toward the East and the Global South such as countries like China, India, South America, and several countries in Africa. This transition, which started around 1920, became more pronounced when the anticipated revolutions in Western Europe failed to materialise. These defeats led to a re-evaluation of the global revolutionary strategy, with increasing emphasis on struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial regions.

This ideological shift was formalised during the 1920 Baku[1] Conference of the Peoples of the East. The conference introduced new theses that challenged the Eurocentric focus of previous socialist movements. Revolutionaries from regions like India and China argued that Europe was not the centre of the world and that successful anti-colonial revolutions in the colonies were essential preconditions for revolution in the imperial centres. They asserted that revolution in the so-called "First World" could only succeed if liberation struggles in the colonies also triumphed. This meant that internationalists, communists, and revolutionaries from colonial powers had a duty to support anti-colonial movements by opposing the colonial policies of their own countries.

Though not universally accepted at first, this position gradually gained prominence, thanks to the efforts of key revolutionary figures. It eventually became the dominant view within the Third International, even if certain factions within European communist parties occasionally resisted it. By the Second Congress of the Third International, the shift in focus toward the East and South was officially endorsed. The Congress declared that the heart of revolutionary struggle was no longer in the Western and Northern hemispheres, but in the Southern and Eastern parts of the world. It also affirmed that the global imperialist system threatening revolutions, including the one in the Soviet Union, could only be dismantled through a worldwide anti-colonial struggle. While the strategic focus of the Third International changed, the approach remained extremely positivist, becoming a topic of criticism for this International.

The Third International also sought to build on the advancements made regarding women's struggles during the Second International. However, statistics and records from conferences reveal a significant under-representation of women in the Third International's decision-making bodies. Although many women actively participated in struggles across various countries, their contributions often went unrecognised, and they were frequently excluded from leadership roles. For the first time, a Women's International was established, existing from 1920 until 1930.

Additionally, a Youth International was organised during this period, aiming for a degree of autonomy. This effort for independence was a natural response from both the organised youth and women, as their struggles arose from distinct realities and unique challenges they faced. However, this pursuit of autonomy was eventually curtailed.

Initially, the Youth International attempted to base itself not within the relative safety of the Soviet Union, but in the centre of revolutionary struggle—Germany—operating under conditions of illegality and facing harsh repression. Their aim was to emphasise the necessity of revolutionary action outside of the Soviet Union, where the revolution had already succeeded, but elsewhere had not. For two or three years, they maintained this level of autonomy, not rejecting the leadership of the Communist International, but seeking to organise according to the particular dynamics of youth movements. Their objective was to play a more decisive and radical role by positioning themselves in the heart of enemy territory rather than in Moscow. However, this autonomy was gradually eroded as they were integrated into the leadership of the Third International, and the centre of their activities was eventually relocated to Moscow.

1 ***Baku*** *was the capital of Soviet Azerbaijan*

Both the Youth and the Women's International eventually dissolved. While these organisations aimed for a degree of autonomy within the Communist International, they gradually became more integrated into the broader strategy of the Third International. Ultimately, both were dissolved under the pretext that their issues had either been addressed or would be resolved through the socialist revolution and the establishment of genuine socialism.

A key contradiction that emerged during the Third International was the belief among revolutionaries at the outset of the October Revolution that this event would serve as a catalyst for global revolutionary movements. It was anticipated that the Russian Revolution and the subsequent construction of the Soviet Union would bolster and enhance revolutionary struggles worldwide. For a time —about two to three years—this expectation seemed plausible, as massive uprisings, widespread workers' strikes, and soldiers' revolts occurred. Various Soviet republics were established, the monarchy in Austria was overthrown, and revolutionary attempts unfolded in Germany, among other developments.

But in the end, they failed to succeed according to the analysis of the Third International. Over time, the focus shifted from the reality of power and state authority within the Soviet Union to the question of whether to concentrate on world revolution or on defending the existence of the Soviet Union. This shift was accompanied by a theoretical change in the early 1920s, as discussions transitioned from the necessity of world revolution for achieving socialism to the concept of socialism in one country. Consequently, while the Communist Party and the Soviet Union were initially regarded as a section within the Communist International, the International increasingly became dependent on Soviet policies, both materially and politically.

Significant struggles were undertaken, including revolutionary uprisings in various regions, support for anti-colonial movements in the East and South, and the mobilisation of international brigades in Spain to resist the rise of fascism in Europe. These achievements were not solely the result of the Communist International's efforts but were organisationally bolstered by its strength.

Parallel to this, anarchist international formations continued to organise and seek influence from the time of the First International's separation to the present, through various federations and associations such as the International Working People's Association aka 'Black International', the International Worker's Association, and the International of Anarchist Federations which still exists until today.

The processes of these three Internationals illustrate the evolving dynamics of revolutionary thought and practice, highlighting the complexities of ideological struggle and the persistent quest for solidarity among the working class worldwide. Despite their divergences, they collectively shaped the landscape of international socialism, underscoring the ongoing need for unity in the face of oppressive forces.

3. Soviet Union, Real-socialism and International Solidarity (after 1945)

In continuation of the discussion on the three Internationals this chapter focuses on three key topics regarding the theoretical discourse on internationalism and its implementation by the Soviet Union and other socialist states post-World War II. These topics include the relationship between the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Nationalism, and Internationalism; the debate between Socialism in One Country versus Permanent Revolution; and the Culture of Peoples' Friendship.

On one hand, it's important to examine the theoretical foundations of the Third International, alongside the internal conflicts that arose. On the other hand, the post-World War II era brought the rise of the concept of "peoples' friendship" as a practical expression of international solidarity. In exploring these, there will be a focus on examples from the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as it is also the personal context of the chapter's author.

Relationship Between the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Nationalism, and Internationalism

Proletarian internationalism has long been a core principle of Marxism-Leninism, forming the ideological basis of the Soviet Union, socialist states, and many liberation movements until the 1990s. The PKK's foundation, for example, was inspired by these ideals. The ultimate goal, defined as world revolution, continues to be a pursuit today. However, the road to world revolution has been understood differently by various leaders over time, influenced by changing political, economic, and social conditions, including fascism and imperialist aggression, requiring constant re-evaluation of strategies and tactics.

One major point of debate was the connection between the right of nations to self-determination, nationalism, and internationalism. Lenin's thesis linked socialist revolution with the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. This concept, particularly his 1916 assertion that "Victorious socialism must achieve complete democracy and, consequently, not only bring about the complete equality of nations, but also give effect to the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to free political secession'' became a cornerstone for many anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Abya Yala.

Lenin's idea was largely interpreted as advocating the creation of independent nation-states as part of the liberation process. However, this notion sparked controversy. Rosa Luxemburg, for instance, warned of the dangers of bourgeois nationalism influencing the working class, arguing that the focus should be on uniting proletarians in a shared internationalist, anti-imperialist class struggle. For Luxemburg, an independent nation-state for oppressed peoples like the Poles would not necessarily solve class oppression. Instead, she suggested that cultural autonomy, combined with a united working-class movement, would be a better solution.

Throughout the 20th century, most revolutionary and national liberation movements embraced Lenin's concept, viewing the establishment of independent nation-states as part of the socialist world revolution. Lenin's ideas also formed the basis for recognising the right to self-determination in international law and later in UN conventions after World War II.

However, the Soviet Union itself often violated these principles of self-determination. Repressive interventions in Hungary in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, and the occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 illustrate this contradiction. These actions reveal how Soviet support for national liberation was often conditional, based on geo-strategic interests rather than consistent ideological commitment. In the case of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination, for example, the Soviet Union offered no direct support, reflecting this selective approach.

Socialism in One Country vs Permanent Revolution

Stalin's approach focused on the Soviet Union achieving socialism within its borders before pursuing broader international socialist revolutions. After the October Revolution, Stalin argued that due to the difficulties faced by the Soviet Union—including internal backwardness, famines, and its largely feudal, agrarian society—it was necessary to prioritise the industrialisation of Russia. According to Marxist theory, an industrial proletariat was a prerequisite for a successful socialist revolution. Stalin believed the Soviet Union first needed to establish the material conditions for socialism by modernising its economy and overcoming the feudal structures in Russia and the Soviet republics.

Moreover, Stalin's stance was influenced by the failure of expected socialist revolutions in industrialised countries like Germany, where movements were suppressed or betrayed by social democratic forces. Additionally, the Soviet Union faced ongoing threats from capitalist and imperialist states, which waged various forms of war and aggression against it. In response, Stalin adopted the strategy of focusing on building socialism within the Soviet Union rather than attempting to spread revolution abroad prematurely. This view stood in opposition to Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution," which called for continuous, international class struggle against capitalism.

Stalin's centralist and bureaucratic approach shaped the Soviet Union's relations with other communist and socialist movements. In the case of the Spanish Revolution, for example, the Soviet Union imposed strict conditions for support, including demands to withdraw women from the frontline and disband certain military units. Weapon support was limited, and the Soviet Union's geopolitical interests often dictated its level of involvement in these international struggles, leading to instances where support was either conditional or entirely withdrawn.

The dissolution of the Comintern (Communist International) also reflects Stalin's prioritisation of state interests over internationalist ideals. The weakening of autonomous women's organising within the Soviet Union is one example of this. Looking at the reality of the Soviet Union, women were initially playing a leading role in ideological discussions, yet over time, there was a slow decline in of the role of the Women's International. The decision to move the centre of the women secretariat from Geneva, where it was very active, to Moscow, clearly influenced the women's organisations. While in the beginning the publications were mainly ideological and related to women's liberation, then they then became more focussed on the image and role of women as mothers in the home., and their roles. Key figures like Alexandra Kollontai, a leading voice in the women's movement and socialist theory, were sidelined—Kollontai was sent to Norway as a diplomat under the pretext of being assigned more "important" tasks. This move weakened the potential for autonomous women's organising within the Comintern, diluting women's roles in leadership and reducing their influence on revolutionary strategy.
The Comintern was dissolved in the following way: Dimitrov, one of the representatives of the Soviet Union, explained that they would give more initiative and autonomy for the development of member parties in their specific national contexts.

As a result, they decided to dissolve the Comintern, or the Third International. However, this occurred in May 1943, during the most challenging phase of the Second World War, when discussions of alliances with the U.S. and Britain were forming to defeat Hitler's fascism. It was widely believed that imperialist powers had requested the Soviet Union to obstruct revolutionary organising that might also pose a threat to them. Therefore, it is likely that Stalin made concessions to the U.S. and Britain to solidify the alliance against Hitler.

After Stalin, under Nikita Khrushchev, there was renewed debate on nationalism, internationalism, and the future direction of socialist movements. At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, it was acknowledged that there could be different paths toward socialism depending on specific national characteristics and conditions. This led to a revival of Soviet internationalism, with the USSR offering renewed support for various anti-colonial and socialist movements across the world.

Simultaneously, the Soviet Union embraced the theory of peaceful coexistence, particularly during the Cold War, when the nuclear arms race posed an ever-present threat of global destruction. Khrushchev emphasised that there were only two options: peaceful coexistence or the most destructive war in history, and there was no third way. This balancing act meant maintaining the socialist gains of the Soviet Union while avoiding a catastrophic conflict with the imperialist powers.

However, this approach was criticised by the Communist Party of China and figures like Che Guevara, who saw it as a betrayal of the revolution. In a speech before the United Nations, Guevara emphasised that for Marxists, peaceful coexistence between nations should not imply coexistence between exploiters and the exploited, or between oppressors and the oppressed. He viewed the Soviet Union's strategy as overly cautious, undermining revolutionary struggle in favour of political realism.

Peoples' Friendship

Despite the complexities, a culture of "peoples' friendship" emerged, fostering international support and solidarity for oppressed peoples and liberation struggles, which transformed the way individuals engaged with one another. This culture was reflected in various propaganda efforts that promoted socialist 'brotherhood.' While I searched for a diverse array of images to illustrate this concept, I found that most representations centred on male figures, with the image of working women notably under-represented.

This concept of peoples' friendship also challenged the nationalist and racist ideologies prevalent in capitalism. In this context, new federal socialist state models were developed, where the nation was not seen solely as the basis for a state. The Soviet Union introduced the notion of the 'Soviet People,' creating identities that transcended ethnicity and religion, emphasising kinship and collective belonging. For instance, Yugoslavia sought to develop a common language, Serbo-Croatian, as part of this internationalist vision of unity.

However, a significant issue remained: the hegemony of particular nationalities within these frameworks. Ideologically, the vision of internationalism was compelling, yet its implementation often revealed disparities. In the Soviet Union, for example, Russian culture and language dominated, while in Yugoslavia, Serbian hegemony was evident. This neglect of diverse national cultures, languages, and histories contributed to conflicts that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as insufficient implementation of self-determination principles led to nationalist tensions in the post-1990 era.

It is also crucial to recognise the strong contrast between the experiences in socialist states and those in capitalist countries, where racist segregation and apartheid-like policies were commonplace. The Soviet Union and other socialist states promoted intercultural marriages, co-education, and, at least formally, upheld equal rights among diverse ethnic and cultural groups, fostering cooperation and collective living among the youth and workers.

Reflecting on these concepts today, particularly regarding the 300 years of unity between Ukraine and Russia and the brotherhood that has been propagated, we must consider how these ideologies were implemented in practice. It is essential to analyse whether the Russian hegemonic approach has contributed to current conflicts, while also acknowledging the role that industrialist states have played in stirring these tensions.

Ultimately, the principle of "peoples' friendship" was a value enshrined in the constitutions of socialist states and incorporated into daily life. In the GDR's pedagogical dictionary, "peoples' friendship" was defined in terms of mutual interest and struggle of the working class against exploitation and oppression, emphasising mutual respect, recognition of national autonomy and sovereignty, and cooperation across political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Yet, reflecting on these concepts necessitates a critical examination of how they were implemented in reality, particularly in light of the enduring tensions rooted in historical hegemonic approaches.

Foundation of internationalist mass organisations on international, national and local levels

Another notable example of democratic mass organisation is the Women's International Democratic Federation, founded in Paris in 1945 as an umbrella organisation for anti-fascist women's groups. After the French government criminalised its activities, the federation's secretariat relocated to East Berlin. This organisation played a crucial role in supporting anti-colonial struggles for women across the globe. By 1988, it had 142 member organisations from 124 countries on all continents.

Various forms of democratic mass organisations emerged during this time, including the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, the International Federation of Resistance Fighters, and organisations representing internationalists who participated in the brigades in Spain. Partisans also joined these federations, alongside the International Organisation of Journalists, the International Union of Students, the World Federation of Scientific Workers, and World Peace Councils, among others.

When considering the establishment of a confederal system for organising different segments of society and fostering connections between them, it is essential to examine the policies and methods employed by these bureaucratic mass organisations. How effectively did they achieve their aims, and where did they fall short?

One practical expression of international solidarity was the establishment of leagues of international friendship, which were organised not only at a global level but also within socialist states. These leagues were founded at both national and local levels, aiming to mobilise society for internationalist solidarity in support of struggles against imperialism and colonialism. In the case of the GDR, this movement also sought to gain international recognition, as it was not formally acknowledged as a state.

In the GDR, delegations from various countries were welcomed, and friendship brigades were sent to nations primarily in Africa, Asia, and Abya Yala. These brigades travelled to countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Mali, Nigeria, Cuba, Chile, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and Cambodia. More than 60 friendship brigades were organised in over 26 countries, with about 5,000 young men and women participating. The purpose of these brigades was to share collective life and work alongside local communities, fostering mutual learning about different cultures and societies.

Participants kept collective diaries reflecting their experiences. One member of a youth brigade from the Free Democratic Youth of East Germany to Angola wrote, "We participate in a meeting like this for the first time in which we can deeply feel the common spirit of internationalism in our hearts." This highlights the significance of internationalism in creating a shared spirit and collective effort in the struggle for liberation. Delegations also organised and coordinated various financial and political solidarity campaigns for different movements.

Importantly, these delegations and international solidarity campaigns were not state-financed; instead, they were collectively funded and materially supported by society. Another avenue of practical solidarity involved campaigns advocating for the freedom of political prisoners, including individuals such as Reese Korbalan from Unidad Popular in Chile, Angela Davis, and Nelson Mandela. Mobilisations against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and the apartheid regime in South Africa led to the establishment of solidarity committees at local levels. These committees facilitated occupational training and further education for individuals from numerous countries who had succeeded in anti-colonial struggles. They also provided medical treatment for guerrilla fighters and freedom activists from liberation movements, all organised through solidarity funds.
In addition to these grassroots efforts, more formal institutions were established in the Soviet Union and other socialist states to support decolonisation. The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, founded in Moscow in 1960, aimed to assist countries that had liberated themselves from colonial dependency. Patrice Lumumba University, named after the Congolese independence leader assassinated in a NATO conspiracy, specifically focused on educating young people from Asia, Africa and Abya Yala, particularly those from poor families.

The university aimed to train qualified specialists in various fields, including engineering, history, philology, medicine, agriculture, science, law and economics.

By 1975, more than 4,250 students from 89 countries outside the Soviet Union had graduated from Lumumba University. Many of these graduates went on to become socialist leaders or presidents of their respective countries, including Mahmoud Abbas from Palestine, Fatima Mahmood from Sudan, and Timirion Femininis from Colombia, associated with the FARC. Daniel Ortega from Nicaragua is another notable example. While the results of this education were mixed, with both positive and negative outcomes, the Soviet Union provided an infrastructure to support the national liberation struggles of many countries.
Solidarity campaigns for Angela Davis in the GDR included the initiative "One Million Roses for Angela," where schoolchildren wrote postcards expressing their support for her. The Soviet Union also honoured more than 72,000 individuals and organisations with the Order of people's friendship for their contributions to strengthening international friendship and cooperation.
Additionally, many documentaries, books, magazines, and other publications produced in socialist countries helped disseminate knowledge about societies and social struggles worldwide, fostering an internationalist culture.

Failures and Shortcomings of the Soviet Model

However, as previously mentioned, this narrative is not one of consistent progress. Numerous contradictions emerged, and despite ambitious goals, neither the Soviet Union nor the socialist system was able to achieve the initial aim of a socialist world revolution; instead, it ultimately collapsed. Since then, we have witnessed a rise in capitalist exploitation, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism on a global scale. Conversely, the search for and struggle toward democratic socialism and a new internationalism have continued to grow, particularly in regions such as Kurdistan and many countries in Abya Yala.

One of the main obstacles to realising a common and successful strategic and tactical approach in the theory and practice of revolutionary internationalism has been the paradigm of capitalist modernity, which is rooted in the nation-state, industrialism and state capitalism, as well as the ideologies of nationalism, religionism, positivism, and sexism. These components of capitalist modernity have profoundly affected revolutionaries who claimed to fight against the capitalist system. Instead of building socialist alternatives, their logic and methods often replicated and reverted to centralism, characterised by a rigid party bureaucracy, a centrally planned economy, a lack of democracy, and an absence of freedom of thought.

Solidarity was frequently defined solely in terms of the benefits to the Soviet Union, leading to a continued competition with the Western bloc rather than the development of genuine alternatives.

This competitive stance manifested in the fields of militarism and environmental destruction, where the paradigm of constant growth and industrialisation, viewed as "progress," actually resulted in the erosion of diversity within societies and neglected the creative revolutionary potentials necessary for building grassroots democracy. This relentless pursuit of growth also took a toll on biodiversity and various ecological systems.

Lastly, the belief that women's equality can be achieved in socialism, simply through equal rights and participation in public life, politics, education, and production, is insufficient. It does not manage to dismantle patriarchal structures and mindsets within families, societies, vanguard parties, mass organisations, and broader movements. It is not enough to assert that "women should participate"; there must be a genuine, organised, autonomous effort, program, and struggle aimed at achieving true equality. The reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the defeat of the Chinese revolution include the lack of development of women's struggle and autonomous structures.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is essential to recognise the need for a new understanding of internationalism in the 21st century. Based on past experiences and evaluations, we must critically assess the paradigms that underlie internationalist theory and practice. In this context, the paradigm of democratic modernity, as articulated by Abdullah Öcalan, offers an internationalist perspective that presents alternatives to the obstacles of capitalist modernity. This approach emphasises the construction of an economic society, an ecological and industrial society, and Democratic Confederalism, all grounded in women's liberation at local, regional, and global levels.

From the experiences of the 20th century, it is clear that an understanding of internationalism cannot be anchored in a nation-state mentality. Instead, it should be rooted in a shared spirit of democratic nationhood that celebrates diversity and the free association of individuals, as well as social, cultural, and ethnic communities, all uniting their lives, labour, and struggles to build a society free from exploitation, founded on solidarity, justice, dignity, and hope.

It is crucial to adopt a creative, dialectical approach to address the contradictions and various lines of discussion we encounter. The past reliance on exclusive, dogmatic approaches has often hindered progressive forces from uniting in a common struggle against shared adversaries. This fragmentation has prevented people around the world, across different fields and contexts, from working together toward a common goal with a unified spirit. I would like to conclude with two quotes:

The first quote comes from a letter written by Şehîd Ronahî (Andrea Wolf) in 1995, as she decided to join the internationalist struggle of the PKK in Kurdistan:

"My concept of internationalism has been reshaped. Until now it has been based on a schematic order: first, build the movement here [in Germany], and then, together with others. But if we are internationalists, we can and must do both at the same time. We can participate in a struggle in another part of the world in order to learn. Our horizon does not stop at our own national borders, especially since we, as people from European metropolises, can only truly understand our situation if we view ourselves through the eyes of others."

The second quote is from Şehîd Nûdem (Uta Schneiderbanger), in 2004:

"Just like the national liberation movements since 1968, the idea of democratic confederalism can shake the world. I want to be a part of the way there."

4. The Spanish Revolution

Another significant chapter in the history of internationalism is the Spanish Revolution, at times referred to as the Spanish Civil War. It was a time of struggle in which the democratic forces of the time demonstrated that democratic and libertarian self-organisation of society was possible. Comprising successes, shortcomings and contradictions, the Spanish Revolution mobilised society and brought together revolutionaries from different movements and parts of the world. The conflict that took place in Spain between 1936 and 1939 was not only a fight against domestic fascism; it was also part of a wider global struggle against fascist regimes in Portugal, Italy and Germany. This revolution emerged as a beacon of hope for freedom and an unforgettable example of internationalism. It was an important element in humanity's history of resistance towards a democratic way of life. Its legacy is still felt today and will continue into the future.

It was a remarkable experiment in anarchism, with anarchists taking on governmental roles and serving as ministers while nurturing grassroots movements to counter Francisco Franco's fascist advance. The Spanish Revolution is a profound example of internationalism, taking various forms — the most well-known of which are perhaps the International Brigades. Organisations and individuals from all over the world came together to support the struggle, and a vast network of material solidarity was established to send crucial resources to Spain. Additionally, numerous groups around the world organised to support the Spanish Revolution.

Although it is often said that 'the Spanish Revolution was defeated', many argue that its legacy has never truly ended. After 1939, Spain endured a 36-year dictatorship under Franco. Our parents were raised under this oppressive regime, and our grandparents — including my 99-year-old grandmother — lived through the Spanish Civil War. The impacts of both fascist ideology and revolutionary struggle are still evident in contemporary Spanish society; they are not just echoes of the past. Following the revolution, the dictatorship aimed to erase the memory of the history of resistance and weaken society by repressing political culture and education, and impoverishing the population.
his has resulted in a general lack of awareness of identity and history, distancing people from their roots.

While acknowledging the influence of the dictatorship, we also recognise our presence in Rojava today and the ongoing struggles of revolutionary movements in Catalonia, Castilla, the Basque Country and other regions as part of that ongoing struggle.
Two striking examples of the internationalism forged during the Spanish Revolution continuing into the present day are the war in Yugoslavia and the 15M movement. In the former, around 2,000 to 3,000 volunteers — including anarchists, communists, syndicalists, and revolutionary youths — travelled from Spain to fight in the first territory to be liberated in Europe. Although the partisan movement comprised nearly 800,000 poorly equipped fighters, the participation of many cadres from the Spanish Revolution was crucial in developing guerrilla warfare tactics.
Another example of this ongoing struggle emerged in 2011 with the mobilisation that gave rise to the 15M[2] movement. Although this movement drew clear inspiration from the Spanish Revolution, it eventually adopted a more reformist approach. It was also significantly influenced by the People's Spring (also known as the Arab Spring), which began in Syria in 2012, leading to the Rojava Revolution. These interconnected events demonstrate the importance of internationalism in the struggle for freedom, showing that ideas transcend borders.

2 ***The anti-austerity movement*** *in Spain, also referred to as the* ***15-M*** *Movement, and the* ***Indignados*** *Movement, was a series of protests, demonstrations, and occupations against austerity policies in Spain that began around the local and regional elections of 2011 and 2012.*

Historical Background

To understand the Spanish Revolution, it is essential to recognise it as the culmination of years of collective organisation by the people of Spain, long before the events of 1936. As Spanish anarchists often point out, revolutions do not spring out of nothing; they require a solid and widespread foundation. To grasp the significance of the Spanish Revolution, we must delve into its historical context, which can be traced back at least 70 years to around 1868, when anarchism first began to take root in Spain.

During this time, anarchists started organising workers in rural areas and villages, promoting collective thought regarding both economics and education. An organised anarchist movement in Spain began in October 1868 with the arrival of Fanelli, a representative of the Bakunist faction within the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). The type of "socialism" Fanelli introduced was known as collectivist anarchism.

Over the last quarter of the 19th century and into the first quarter of the 20th, Spanish anarchism grew into a mass-based popular movement, unparalleled by other experiences in the world. Marxist socialism only made its entrance in Spain two years later, but it never gained the same traction, particularly among workers in Barcelona and Andalucía. Compared to working-class movements in other Western European nations, industrial union activity in Spain was comparatively weaker and slower to develop. In Catalonia, union efforts tended toward reformist positions, primarily focused on seeking limits to working hours and improving wages and working conditions.

In 1931, the Second Republic was declared, backed by the Popular Front—an electoral alliance of various leftist organisations, including the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the Communist Party of Spain, Republicans, as well as Galician and Catalan nationalists, the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), and anarchist trade unions like the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT). Founded in 1910 in Barcelona, the CNT played a crucial role in promoting anarchism across Spain.

Its origins can be traced back to the establishment of the Spanish chapter of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) between 1870 and 1881, and its successor organisation, the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region. The Second Republic introduced numerous reforms aimed at diminishing the traditional powers of the landowning class, the Catholic Church, and the military, garnering support from radicalised youth and rural communities.

The Spanish Civil War started with a military coup in July 1936, rooted in the social, economic, and political turmoil that had characterised early 20th century Spain. The coup was initiated by soldiers from the Spanish Army in Africa in August 1936, when fourteen thousand Spanish and Moroccan troops crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. Once on the Iberian Peninsula, the Army of Africa launched a brutal campaign toward Madrid, employing tactics reminiscent of colonial warfare developed during the Rif Guerrilla War: "sporadic attacks and constant movement on multiple fronts," along with "systematic ethnic cleansing" as a means to impose order.

That same year, Italy and Germany began sending weapons, aircraft, and troops to bolster the insurgents. Italy contributed over seventy thousand soldiers, while both nations supplied hundreds of artillery pieces, combat vehicles, aircraft, and pilots, including the infamous German Condor Legion,

which gained notoriety for its involvement in the bombing of Guernica in April 1937. In August 1936, the French government, along with Britain and the Soviet Union, proposed a non-intervention agreement to limit support for the insurgents; however, Germany and Italy blatantly disregarded it. As the rebels received reinforcements, the Republic faced a critical shortage of weaponry. While fascists gained ground throughout Spain, Madrid and Barcelona held out the longest. On February 27, 1939, Franco's government was officially recognised by France and England. By April 1, 1939, Franco signed the final pact, establishing a dictatorship that would endure until 1975.

During the war and under the dictatorship, the repression and violence inflicted by fascist forces resulted in widespread torture and executions. Fascist troops murdered tens of thousands of individuals, disposing of their bodies in mass graves. To this day, Spain has one of the highest rates of forced disappearances in the world, surpassed only by Cambodia. This reality remains largely unacknowledged, as the Spanish State continues to engage in denial, minimisation, and silence, often placing blame on those who strive to bring the truth to light.

Women's Struggle

The women's struggle within the Spanish revolution is of great relevance. Coming from a longer history of women's resistance and organisation of society, the experience during the civil war represented an important example for women's struggle around the world and it is still inspiring women today.

Mujeres Libres

Mujeres Libres was founded by three anarchist women: writer Lucía Sánchez Saornil, journalist Mercedes Comaposada, and Dr. Amparo Poch y Gascón. They launched the magazine Mujeres Libres in April 1936, just months before the military uprising against the Republic. While seeking financial and material support, they firmly rejected collaboration proposals from men.

Although Mujeres Libres was not the only organisation of women at the time, it gathered the largest membership, boasting around 20,000 members across 153 groups in Republican areas. In August 1937, they established the National Federation of Mujeres Libres, designed as a federal structure with local, provincial, regional, and national committees. Their aim was to cultivate a conscious women's force capable of acting as the vanguard of the revolution. They sought to elevate women's cultural awareness, viewing this as essential for their emancipation, the advancement of the revolution, and their integration into the anarcho-syndicalist struggle.

Mujeres Libres emerged from the recognition of women's lack of empowerment within existing Spanish anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements. The organisation served as a "community of empowerment" for working-class women, providing a framework for their active participation within the broader libertarian movement. Despite the revolutionary changes during the war, traditional gender relations remained largely unaltered. Thus, Mujeres Libres argued that anarchist ideology necessitated an autonomous feminist movement.

They critiqued state and capitalist production systems as rooted in authoritarian and oppressive relationships, asserting that a revolutionary transformation of personal relationships was essential to dismantle domination and subordination. In their radical vision, anarchism could not exclude women. They addressed sexuality, family life, and personal relationships as integral components of the struggle, recognising that oppression manifested in multiple spheres, not solely in the workplace.

Rooted in communalist anarchist traditions, Mujeres Libres emphasised that individual empowerment is inherently collective. They understood that identities are shaped by relationships within families and communities. True egalitarian communities respect diversity and individuality, and living and working together can foster the full development of our personal capacities.

Emma Goldman strongly supported Mujeres Libres, championing the idea that anarchism could empower women. She encouraged Spanish women to forge their own revolution within the libertarian communist framework. Rejecting the notion of home and relationships as private realms, they denounced the church's control over couples and advocated for free love, condemning the traditional family model that normalised women's submission to men. They highlighted the importance of early childhood education, criticising schools for perpetuating bourgeois values, and called for a radical shift in educational systems to emphasise freedom, including sex education and addressing previously taboo subjects like contraceptive methods and abortion.

Inner Struggle and Anarcho-Feminism

Despite their objectives, women's issues were often marginalised within the broader Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement. Many leftist organisations, while theoretically committed to addressing women's subordination, adopted a traditional Marxist perspective that viewed the oppression of women as secondary to class divisions. They believed that the best approach was to organise women within working-class movements to combat class oppression collectively. Thinking that economic transformation would have consequently change social relations, they relegated women's emancipation to a post-revolutionary issue.

Women struggled a lot within their own organisations to make the autonomous structures recognised and accepted. At various congresses, they encountered obstacles or were completely denied the opportunity to speak. This struggle has fostered a strong connection with the Kurdish women's movement, which represents a source of inspiration; for the first time in history, we witness such organised and strong autonomy within a revolutionary movement.

In contrast, anarchism recognised the multiplicity of domination, asserting that economic restructuring alone would not suffice to achieve human emancipation. This perspective opened the door for greater theoretical focus on female subordination. However, anarcho-syndicalism continued to prioritise economic struggle between classes, emphasising the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the collectivisation of the means of production, which again pushed women's issues into the background.

Parallel to this, feminist movements tended to address women's subordination within a patriarchal context, sometimes without fully accounting for economic oppression. Anarcho-feminism critiqued both approaches, advocating for a dual struggle against capitalism and patriarchy—acknowledging the intersection of class and gender oppression. Mujeres Libres championed this dual struggle, emphasizing that both systems contributed to different forms of enslavement. While founded with the explicit goal of women's emancipation, its anarchist identity meant it was deeply aligned with the broader objectives of the CNT and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI). Their primary aim was to organize women for the anarcho-syndicalist struggle, viewing institutional feminism as inherently reformist and incompatible with their vision of social transformation.

Maquis

The Spanish Maquis consisted of guerrilla fighters who were exiled to France after the Civil War and continued to resist Francoist Spain until the early 1960s. During the uprising in non-Republican areas, many sought refuge in the mountains. They engaged in sabotage, robberies (to fund their resistance), occupations of the Spanish embassy in France, and assassinations of Francoists, all while contributing to the fight against Nazi Germany and the Vichy regime in France during World War II. After 1939, repression intensified, pushing many Maquis fighters to go to France to join the war against fascism, illustrating the internationalist character of their struggle. Some later returned to Spain to continue fighting against the fascist regime there.

These guerrillas came from a variety of political backgrounds, including communism, socialism, and anarchism. During the Civil War, discussions about guerrilla warfare against Franco's Nationalists began to emerge. The short-term goal was to disrupt the Nationalists' communication and supply lines, while the long-term aim was to continue fighting Franco if defeats were suffered on conventional fronts. While guerrilla operations thrived in rural, isolated areas, urban groups particularly in Barcelona operated differently. These groups were often supported by the CNT. Meanwhile, the urban guerrillas in Madrid were more communist in character.

As Franco's repression of the resistance escalated, the Maquis declined. Many members were arrested or killed, while others sought refuge in France or Morocco. Driven by paranoia, Franco ordered the construction of extensive barricades and defensive bunkers along the Pyrenees, fearing an Allied invasion. His obsession also extended to plans for military fortifications in the Canary Islands, for which he sought Hitler's assistance. The Pyrenees, historically a natural border between Spain and France, were militarised, turning a beautiful natural area into a symbol of war.

Internationalist Brigades

The Internationalist Brigades are probably the most well known example of the internationalist character of the Spanish Revolution. Comprised of over 60,000 volunteers from 54 different countries, they had been officially established by the Comintern, on Trotskyist ideas of the importance of spreading the revolution globally. In this framework the Spanish revolution can be seen as a precursor to World War II. All factions, from fascists to revolutionaries, analysed it as a crucial moment to determine the future global assets.

I would like to share a personal memory. When I was a child, my family and I were returning from visiting my grandmother in her village. As my mother drove, we heard on the radio that a group of people were returning to Catalonia to receive an homage. My mother decided we could not miss it, so we drove an hour to Barcelona. I didn't understand why, but I trusted her. When we arrived at Sants, the main train station in Barcelona, I was surprised by the crowd. Many people were gathered, and suddenly, a group of elderly people entered from one of the gates, some wearing medals, their faces marked by age. They were from the International Brigades. For many of them, this was their first return to Catalonia after the war, and they were coming to receive an official homage from the Parliament. Surrounding them were joyful people singing and laughing. It was a deeply moving experience. At that moment, I realized that I wanted to be part of something that embodied profound solidarity, commitment, and internationalism.

Background

When the coup d'état began on July 18, 1936, solidarity efforts were quickly organized. By early August, hundreds of anarchists were eager to travel to Spain to confront the uprising and pursue the long-awaited social revolution. Spain was seen as fertile ground for these ideals. While many International Brigades joined military efforts, their contributions extended beyond the battlefield; they engaged in various forms of work across different fronts, or "barrios" in Madrid.

An interesting prelude occurred in Barcelona just days before the fascist coup—the Anti-Fascist Olympic Games were set to take place from July 19to 26 1936, as a counter to the Berlin Olympics. The uprising on July 19 found hundreds of anti-fascist athletes already committed to the resistance, facilitating the organization of the internationalists. This highlights the potential for mobilization when preparation aligns with events.

Initially, some anarchists criticized the participation of internationalists, arguing that there was no need for "people" to join the frontline but rather a need for weapons and ammunition. They believed that every organization should mainly focus on building the revolution in their own country. This raises essential questions still relevant for us today, about the nature of internationalism. Is internationalism necessarily connected to going abroad and fighting or does it also consist of supporting struggles at home?

In 1938, the Comintern sought to withdraw all internationalists from Spanish territory, but around 6,000 chose to remain and continue the fight. This decision overlooked the fact that Italy and Germany were sending troops to support Franco's forces. For many internationalists, particularly those from Germany and Italy, returning home posed a significant risk of repression, leading them to stay in Spain. As the dictatorship began, they faced grim prospects.

While the communists provided formal organizational structures and resources, hundreds of anarchist volunteers participated in the conflict, often financing their own travel and operating without formal support from any libertarian organization. They joined militias and the Republican Army, serving in international brigades like the XV Batallion (Abraham Lincoln Brigade).

The participation of Spanish anarchists in political and government positions during the war also led to ideological shifts and controversies. Several anarchist leaders represented anarchism in the Popular Front government shortly after the war began. These roles created tensions within the libertarian movement, as the CNT moved closer to government collaboration, distancing itself from the revolutionary policies advocated by the FAI. On June 30, 1937, the FAI in Barcelona called for a separation from the CNT, amid government-imposed restrictions on forces aligned with the Comintern and the Soviet regime under Joseph Stalin. Some anarchist factions even attempted to organize against the entry of these brigades into Spain. Ultimately, the desperate military situation on the Republican side led to a compromise with the creation of these forces, fronted by the French communist André Marty.

The Argentine Communist Federation (FACA), founded in October 1935, played a crucial role in establishing the Coordinating Commission for Aid to Spain, mobilizing solidarity centres that served as recruitment sources for libertarian militants entering the labour movement. Collection centres emerged across Argentina, sending substantial supplies—including 600 tons of wheat and flour, and 300 tons of meat, clothing, and medicine—during the conflict. An Antifascist International Solidarity network, primarily organized by anarchists, aimed to form aid committees to support Spain, connecting activists with anti-fascist ideologies.

The internationalism that flourished in Spain also significantly influenced Abya Yala and beyond. After 1939, many Spanish revolutionaries fled to Mexico and Argentina, where they supported local struggles.

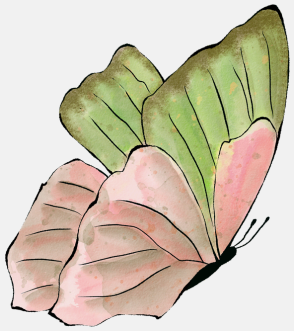
The International Brigades are also known for the writers who participated, such as George Orwell, who documented his experience in Spain as a member of a militia affiliated with the POUM in his work Homage to Catalonia. Other notable writers included John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway. However, it's essential to recognize that the story isn't just romantic; many continued to fight against fascism during World War II. Their legacy serves as an enduring reminder of what internationalism, solidarity, and commitment to a cause truly mean.

Conclusions

The Spanish Revolution was a struggle against fascism in all its forms. Understanding its history is essential to continuing our struggle today. Due to its unique characteristics, the Spanish Revolution represents an almost one-of-a-kind experience in the history of democratic struggles. It is an experience from which we can draw strength and learn lessons. This includes everything from its organisation of society and economy (based on a system of communes and cooperatives) to its internationalist spirit and the role women achieved through their struggle.

The coming together of different groups, such as communists, anarchists, republicans, and regional independents, is an important example of how different democratic forces can fight together against fascism. Many questions and contradictions may arise in our minds when we think about this particular moment: How did anarchist movements approach being in the majority? How did communists approach the structural organisation proposed by anarcho-syndicalists? How did anarcho-feminists struggle alongside Marxists?

As previously mentioned, the Rojava Revolution follows in the footsteps of the Spanish Revolution and all other democratic struggles in history. It is the path of the people's resistance, of society. The path toward freedom. Therefore, we believe that many of these contradictions have been resolved through the philosophy and proposals of Abdullah Öcalan.



5. The Cuban Revolution and the Tri-Continental

What is internationalism? Who are the internationalists? While we pose these questions we try to understand past struggles and find ways to practice it in the present, in our own way and context. As a commission representing Brazil, the Philippines, and Cameroon—spanning Abya Yala, Africa, and Asia—three friends are aiming to providing some insights into this conference.

The Cuban Revolution inspired anti-colonial and revolutionary movements worldwide. It served as the backdrop for the Tri-Continental Conference in Havana, where over 500 delegations from 80 countries—representing states, liberated nations, and revolutionary organisations—gathered to forge a united front against imperialism and colonialism. These events from more than 60 years ago have relevance today, not only because of their historical continuation but because we can reflect on examples from history while we face imperialism, embargoes, dictatorships, and connect present day struggles and build international solidarity.

Cuba

We'd like to begin by discussing Cuba and its international impact. On January 1, 1959, after three years of guerrilla warfare, revolutionary forces entered Havana, solidifying not only the hope and militant spirit of the Cuban people but also that of all of Latin America. It's important to note that Fidel Castro and Che Guevara were trained by Spanish exiles who had fled to Mexico after the Spanish Civil War. This creates an interesting international link.

At the time of the Cuban Revolution, communist parties across Latin America, established during the era of the Comintern (Communist International), adhered to the Soviet policy of so-called "peaceful coexistence" with the United States, which focused on reformism and parliamentary struggles. These parties believed that the conditions for revolutionary struggle were absent, limiting their activities to electoral politics.

However, when the Cuban Revolution triumphed, it shattered this reformist illusion. Cuba provided a vibrant, living example that revolution was not only possible but necessary. Suddenly, it became both urgent and possible to not only express solidarity with the Cuban Revolution but to apply its lessons—demonstrating that revolutionary struggle was the true path to victory. Cuba, a small island, rose up like a giant against the US Empire, igniting the hope of revolution across the continent.

It caused a drastic division in the Latin American left between the two positions - armed revolution and reformism. Cuban revolutionary figures, Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara embodied Latin American identity and consciousness. The various territorial and cultural differences in Abya Yala are united by a common history of not only exploitation and aggression, massacre and colonisation, but also of indomitable resistance. The Cuban revolution provided concrete hope for revolutionary possibilities and the reaffirmation of the combative line against reformism. This was beyond and above the classical divisions of the left.

Guerrilla movements inspired by the Cuban revolution emerged in Latin America between the 1960s and 1970s. Cuba provided a safe haven and effective training camps for a majority of these guerrilla movements. In many cases guerrilla movements in Latin America dogmatically applied the experience in Cuba to their own countries. These movements waged armed revolution without analysing their own conditions and realities. At least for the majority of them, of course there are exceptions, this led to failures and mistakes that can offer perspective and insight today. We need to recognise the challenge of being inspired by a revolutionary movement while resisting the urge to simply replicate it. Instead, we must understand its core principles on a deeper level and adapt them thoughtfully to our own unique contexts.

It's worth mentioning Abraham Guillén, a Spanish revolutionary who fought with the CNT militias on the Guadalajara front during the Spanish Civil War. After Franco's victory, he fled to Abya Yala, dedicating the next 40 years of his life to supporting and instructing various guerrilla movements, especially in Argentina and Uruguay. Later, he went to Cuba, where he engaged in critical discussions on how to apply the lessons of guerrilla warfare while staying grounded in local realities. Guillén emphasised the importance of avoiding the illusion that revolution is always imminent, urging instead a deeper, context-based understanding of revolutionary strategy.

The Cuban Revolution also provoked a strong reaction, particularly from the United States. In response to growing revolutionary movements across Abya Yala, U.S. imperialism developed an elaborate military strategy to suppress these movements. As the continent began to rise up, the U.S. saw it as a collective threat. Numerous military coups were orchestrated by dictators or military regimes with the CIA's aid. These operations consolidated repression on a continental scale through Operation Condor.

This operation refined the mechanisms of repression used by fascist military dictatorships. Though difficult to quantify, evidence from military archives, human rights investigations, and survivor testimonies reveals the devastating toll: hundreds of thousands were detained and tortured and tens of thousands were murdered or disappeared as a result of these efforts.

The collapse of the USSR brought significant hardships for the Cuban people, who had relied heavily on the Soviet Bloc for economic support and aid. However, the revolutionary consciousness of the Cuban people, coupled with their strong ties to their leadership, allowed them to endure the severe challenges of the 1990s. Despite the crisis, they remained steadfast in defending both the revolution and their country. The pride of the Cuban people is not only admirable but fully justified, given the enormity of the obstacles they faced.

Important achievements of the Cuban Revolution remain alive to this day: a high-quality healthcare system that remains public and free. This system not only serves the Cuban population but also extends aid to the Global South and provides medical education to international students. While Cuba once trained guerrillas, today it trains doctors, and its education system—also public, affordable, and free—has been instrumental in eradicating illiteracy and fostering a self-educating populace since the revolution’s early years.

However, it's essential to also acknowledge the shortcomings. The geographic and productive limitations of an island nation like Cuba present ongoing challenges. In its alignment with the Soviet Union, Cuba’s economic relationship mirrored old colonial models, where sugar was exported in exchange for technology and needed products. This dependency, akin to traditional colonial dynamics, left the Cuban economy reliant on the export of a single commodity.

Moreover, seizing the State apparatus led to the bureaucratisation of the revolution, resulting in repression of any dissent, particularly from other revolutionary currents. A divide emerged between the political class and the general population, as economic and class inequalities persisted. This disparity was further exacerbated by the rise of tourism after the 1990s, which deepened social inequalities on the island.

Imperialist powers have never accepted the existence of revolutionary Cuba—just as the white oligarchies of the Americas have never accepted the black independence of Haiti. To this day, they employ a fierce economic embargo, massive disinformation campaigns, the infiltration of foreign capital (through smuggling and luxury tourism), and the presence of agent provocateurs and traitors. This situation reminds us of that of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

The Precedents of the Tri-Continental

In April 1955, well before the Cuban Revolution, a conference featuring leaders from 29 newly independent nations that had once been colonised by Europe was held in Bandung, Indonesia. Another conference followed in Cairo in 1957, propelling the Organisation for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa and Asia (OSPAAAL) to reinforce its commitment to acknowledging colonialism and advocating for non-alignment during the Cold War.

In 1961, another global conference of the Non-Aligned Movement convened in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. During these meetings, Cuba began to make its presence felt by sending delegations, and the idea of expanding this network of solidarity to include Latin America gained traction with the involvement of various movements attending these conferences. At this time, independent so-called Third World countries forged relationships of solidarity to safeguard their existence. Despite many countries adopting a non-aligned stance, the USSR maintained a policy of peaceful coexistence.

In April 1961, following an observer delegate's participation in an OSPAAAL meeting in Bandung, Cuba recognised the need to expand OSPAAAL's focus to encompass the peoples of Latin America. Subsequently, at a meeting in 1963, they resolved to organise a conference uniting three continents: Africa, Asia, and Latin America—the Tri-Continental. Cuban and other Latin American delegations participated in the third OSPAAAL conference held in Moshi, Tanzania, in 1963.

It is essential to highlight the role of Mehdi Ben Barka, the Moroccan revolutionary politician. He assumed a leading role in the preparatory committee for the Tri-Continental Conference, constantly travelling between Africa, Asia, and Latin America to organise it. Ben Barka stated that "this will lead to greater unity among the anti-imperialist forces of each country, initiating a positive process among organisations in which there may be secondary differences, in the face of an enemy that aims to be an international gendarme." This encapsulates the spirit in which the conference would convene in Havana.

Not only was he fighting for independence, but he was also committed to advancing social transformation on a global scale. He sought to gather support beyond the growing divide between the Soviet Union and China regarding leadership in revolutionary movements. Unfortunately, Ben Barka was kidnapped, tortured, and disappeared on October 29, 1965, in an international conspiracy involving the Moroccan monarchy and the French state, just two months before the Tri-Continental Conference.

At that time, Cuba had recently navigated the Cuban Missile Crisis (1963) and had overcome the turbulent events of the CIA's invasion at Playa Girón. The year 1966 marked the seventh anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, leading to a significant mobilisation of the Cuban people and various movements in preparation for the conference.

The Tri-Continental Conference

I want to start with an excerpt from a U.S. Senate report. It states, "It is humiliating enough to have the international communist conspiracy seize control of a country only 60 miles from American shores. It becomes a thousand times as humiliating when that country is transformed into a headquarters for international revolutionary subversion." This was an official statement from the U.S. government, demonstrating that U.S. imperialism felt afraid and threatened by this conference. As an enemy of the oppressed peoples of the world, this is a reason for the people to rejoice.

At the conference, we saw an affirmation of U.S. imperialism's fears, as revolutionary movements from Asia, Africa, and Latin America gathered to strike against it and build anti-imperialist and anti-colonial solidarity. It was a new form of internationalism emerging from the peoples of colonies and neo-colonies.

Why was this conference so historic? The oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America were often excluded from participation and left out of important discussions in previous iterations of international movements. The gathering together was a declaration, they were stating 'We will not follow the dictates and directives of existing socialist countries as oppressed peoples of these three continents. We have been left out of history books; we are going to write our own history. We are going to assemble ourselves and give voice to our own liberation.'

It was the first time these movements had come together to discuss how they would coordinate and strengthen their solidarity. Unlike previous international gatherings, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, this conference was attended by delegates committed to revolutionary armed struggle.

During this period, the Vietnam War was a focal point of resistance and a central topic at the conference. The U.S. was escalating troop deployments in Vietnam as part of its aggressive intervention, accompanied by a massive bombing campaign in North Vietnam and Laos. I recall a friend telling me that the U.S. dropped more bombs during the Vietnam War than were used in total during World War II.

Within the U.S., there was a growing anti-war movement and domestic opposition. Revolutionary organisations like the Black Panther Party represented the aspirations of oppressed nations within the United States, building relationships with the Cuban people while also expressing international solidarity with the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

One of the key historical points at this conference was Che Guevara's message. Although he was not in attendance, he sent a message to the delegates. He believed that, while the countries within Asia, Africa, and Latin America had unique and distinct characteristics, they shared a unity in the face of imperialism. He called on the peoples of the Third World to bring an end to imperialism through revolutionary internationalism and armed struggle.

He urged the delegates to look to Vietnam as an example of resistance. In his message, he said, "How close we could look into a bright future should 2, 3 or many Vietnams flourish throughout the world. With their share of deaths and their immense tragedies, their everyday heroism, their repeated blows against imperialism. And if we were all capable of uniting to make our blows stronger and infallible, and so increase the effectiveness of all kinds of support given to the struggling people, how great and close would that future be."

Participation in the Conference

The Tri-Continental Conference was held from January 3 to 14, 1966, in Havana, attended by many participants. The event coincided with the celebrations of the seventh anniversary of the Cuban Revolution and involved a significant mobilisation of the Cuban people.

Anonymous heroes of history, including translators and workers involved in logistics, cooking, and cleaning, played essential roles. The Soviet Union and China were also present, highlighting the political disputes of the time, which Cuba sought to mediate. One of the objectives of the Tri-Continental was to unify the "two currents" into a cohesive front against imperialism and capitalism.

Documentation about the Tri-Continental and women's participation is limited, and general information about the details of the conference is scarce. However, it is clear that women played a very active role in the various struggles represented there. Posters from the event, including one for International Women's Day on March 8, illustrate this involvement. Despite women's participation in these struggles, leadership was predominantly male, reflecting the shortcomings of the organisations involved. With the little information available, the specific roles women played at the Tri-Continental remain unclear.

Nonetheless, we can highlight two notable women who participated in the Tri-Continental:

Josephine Baker: A French artist and political activist, who fought against racism and colonisation while championing the rights of Afro-Americans. Baker regularly visited Cuba and, in December 1965, met Fidel Castro, warning him of a potential assassination attempt, as several such attempts had been foiled at the time.

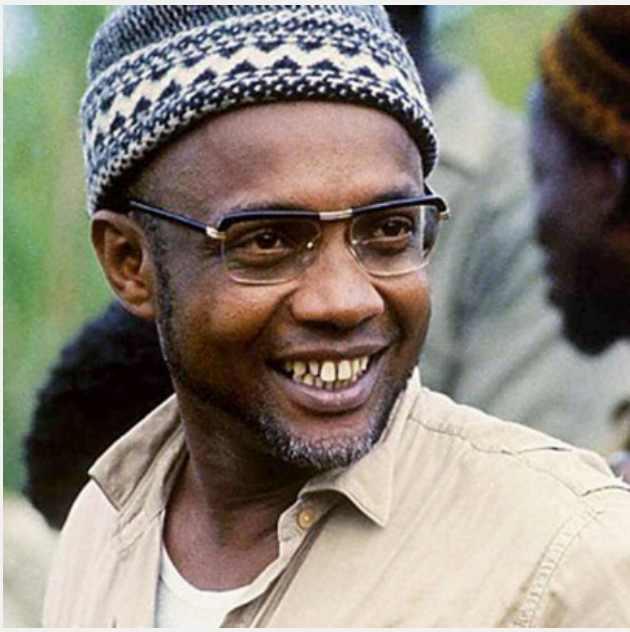
Michele Firk: A journalist and revolutionary, who attended the Tri-Continental and participated in the struggle of the FLN in Algeria, later joining a guerrilla movement in Guatemala, where she ultimately lost her life. In a letter to a French comrade, she expressed her commitment to the revolutionary struggle: "It is not shameful to make the revolutionary struggle the axis of one's life around which everything else will only be incidental. We are citizens of the world, and the world is vast; here or there, there is no point in geographic fatalism. Though my means are limited and weak, I put them entirely in the fight. I refuse anyone who steals the ideas on whose behalf I will fight to the death."

1960s & 1970s in Africa

In Africa, during the 1960s and 1970s, most countries achieved so-called "independence." However, while some colonies continued to face intense revolutionary armed struggles, this formal independence often masked a new form of colonialism. Control over African economies and resources largely remained in the hands of European powers. This era was marked by dictatorships, military coups, and the assassinations of many revolutionary and progressive leaders. Decolonisation across the continent remained incomplete, and Françafrique exemplifies how neo-colonialism still prevents true economic independence.

This was also a time of international solidarity in resistance. Countries in Abya Yala and Asia, experiencing similar domination and crimes committed by major global powers like the United States, France, and England, shared this struggle for sovereignty.

Amílcar Cabral



Amílcar Cabral, a key leader from Guinea-Bissau, deeply influenced liberation movements with his ideas. Speaking on behalf of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), he highlighted essential principles for national liberation.
He emphasised the importance of tackling internal weaknesses, which he considered more challenging than external resistance. Cabral believed that effective revolution must emerge organically from within each society, not through imported strategies. Using the metaphor, "However hot the water from the spring, it does not bake your rice," he stressed that transformation requires understanding and effort rooted in each unique context.

Cabral also rejected the notion that history begins with class structures, asserting that this view unfairly excluded African, Asian, and Abya Yalan histories before imperialism. For him, true national liberation restored a people's historical identity, reclaiming their place in history through the defeat of imperial domination.

Declarations of the Tri-Continental Conference

- Total Political Independence: The Conference asserted the right to full political independence, advocating for all necessary forms of struggle, including armed resistance, to achieve this goal.

- Militant Solidarity: It called for vigorous, dynamic solidarity among the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, uniting them under an anti-imperialist framework.

- Right to Revolutionary Violence: The declaration upheld the right of oppressed nations to use revolutionary violence in response to imperialist aggression, defending national sovereignty and independence.

- Support for Liberation Movements: It endorsed the obligation of the peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to provide both material and moral support to nations fighting for their freedom or facing imperialist attacks.

- Condemnation of US Aggression in Vietnam: The Conference condemned the United States' war in South Vietnam, labelling American leaders as war criminals for their violent actions against the Vietnamese people.

- Economic Autonomy: It urged the eradication of all remnants of imperialist economic control and encouraged the development of independent economies.

- Access to Technology and Education: The Conference advocated for the right to technology access, highlighting the need for educational reform that would begin with eradicating illiteracy and advance towards a technical revolution.

- Healthcare Rights: It asserted the right to a healthy life, including access to medical and preventive care for all people.

- Military and Foreign Base Removal: The declaration supported the liberation of all nations from the presence of foreign and military bases on their land.

- Condemnation of the US Blockade of Cuba: The Conference denounced the US blockade against Cuba, which included restrictions on essential resources like food and medicine, describing it as an act of aggression.

- Solidarity with Palestine: It expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle to liberate their homeland from imperialist and Zionist forces.

- Equality and Anti-Racism: The declaration emphasised the principle of equality for all and called on peoples to combat all forms of racism and discrimination.

- Support for Working Class and Progressive Movements in Capitalist Countries: The Conference extended greetings to the working classes and progressive movements in capitalist nations, urging greater solidarity with the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

- Influence on Global Class Struggle: It affirmed that the liberation of Asia, Africa, and Latin America would inspire the working class and oppressed populations in the US and developed European countries.

- Advancement of Class Struggle in Capitalist Nations: The Conference underscored that the intensification of class struggle within capitalist countries would contribute to the progress of national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Organisational Outcomes of the Tri-Continental Conference

The Tri-Continental Conference led to significant organisational initiatives aimed at fostering anti-imperialist solidarity across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. To maintain ideological cohesion and communicate with global audiences, the conference established The Tri-Continental Journal, a publication devoted to anti-imperialist discourse and uniting movements worldwide.

One key outcome was the founding of OSPAAAL (Organisation of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) in Havana. OSPAAAL's mission was to provide material support for revolutionary movements, which included guerrilla training, propaganda, and the provision of arms. Over time, however, OSPAAAL shifted away from advocating armed struggle, eventually adopting a focus on themes of "people's development"—a change influenced by the growing rapprochement between Cuba and the United States, which contributed to OSPAAAL's dissolution in 2019.

The conference also established OLAS (Latin American Solidarity Organisation), headquartered in Havana as a counter to the OAS (Organisation of American States). OLAS symbolised Latin American unity against Pan-Americanism, supporting armed movements through ideological alignment, strategic coordination, and resource provision. At its 1967 conference, OLAS developed anti-imperialist strategies and promoted guerrilla tactics for achieving socialist revolution. However, the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia and Soviet opposition to "adventurism" ultimately led to OLAS's dissolution.

Despite these efforts, the Tri-Continental's initiatives encountered operational challenges. While Cuba served as a sanctuary for revolutionary leaders, OLAS members struggled to establish cohesive structures, with each group maintaining its own unique relationship with Havana. This limited the effectiveness of coordinated actions and highlighted the difficulties in translating ideological unity into sustained, coordinated operations across diverse regions.

Conclusion: Forging Paths Forward in the Global Struggle for Liberation

In a world once defined by multiple power centres, imperialism today appears to be evolving in form rather than essence, still exerting control over oppressed territories. Kurdistan exemplifies this global reality, highlighting both the persistence of oppression and the urgent need for solidarity. Reflecting on the legacy of the Tri-Continental Conference, we can derive crucial lessons for today.

To advance these ideals, we must persist in building networks of solidarity and enhancing coordination among our diverse struggles and movements. How, then, can the fight against imperialism be effectively materialised today? From this perspective, oppressed peoples must organise across multiple levels to suit their specific contexts, envisioning strategies that address local territories while aligning with a global liberation movement.

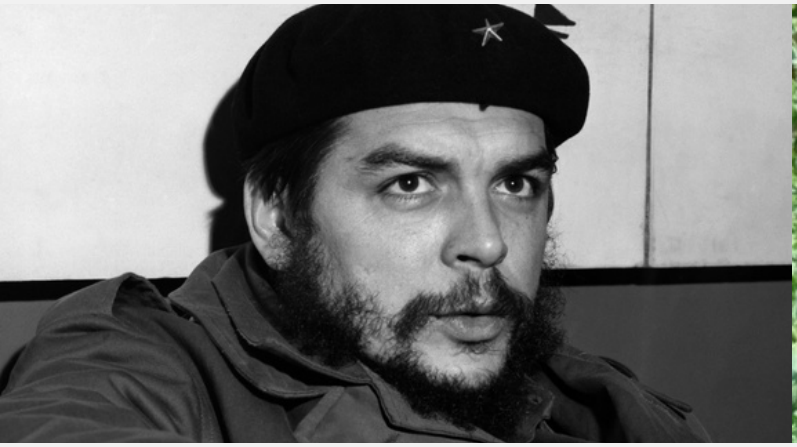
Such a strategy cannot arise spontaneously or through isolated actions; rather, it demands structured mechanisms that channel collective efforts toward victory. The Rojava Revolution offers a compelling model—bridging historical lessons with innovative frameworks for self-governance and resistance. As Abdullah Öcalan expressed, Rojava represents a "burning furnace of the world revolution," an arena where ideals are refined and realised.

Today, a pressing need exists to translate solidarity from declarations into concrete, unified actions. A new International must strive to serve not only as a symbol of global solidarity but as a practical tool for action, empowering local movements while fostering international coordination. The struggle for worldwide liberation calls on each of us to contribute with dedication, sincerity, and an openness that transcends factionalism. In doing so, we pave the way toward a future rooted in socialism and freedom.

Post-Script: “La Entrañable Transparencia”

As final words, we would like to remember two Argentine doctors who, at different times, went to Cuba and, from there, pursued a path dedicated to seeking hope, freedom, and commitment to the revolutionary struggle of oppressed peoples. Both, unfortunately, left us as martyrs in the fulfilment of duty.

Ernesto Che Guevara and Alina Sanchez / Lêgerîn Çiya exemplified the life of an internationalist and revolutionary, eternally committed to the cause of the oppressed in building libertarian socialism. Che claimed that it was in the attitude of guerrilla fighters that he glimpsed the new human being. Is this not what the Rojava Revolution and the history of the PKK/Kurdistan Freedom Movement have shown us through countless stories of tragic and heroic acts?



Their lives have passed, leaving us only memories, photographs, videos, and their graves. Yet, their actions continue; they are not gone and remain alive as we follow in their footsteps on this long journey. We pledge before this assembly to honour them with a lifetime of struggle. If we stay faithful to their memory and unfold their legacy in new actions and ideas, we will have no reason to fear the enemy. We carry them in our hearts, together with the vision of a new world.

And above all, beyond resounding words, we will seek to feel, in our deepest core, any injustice committed against anyone, anywhere in the world.

We can still hear Alina and Ernesto as they whisper from the depths of the earth:

Hasta siempre, compañeras!

6. Anti-Colonial struggles

The Kurdistan Freedom Movement is widely recognised for waging a significant anti-colonial struggle, but many other national liberation movements have also placed their struggles within an international context, connecting their fight to global movements. While history has documented numerous anti-colonial struggles, many remain hidden, particularly due to the patriarchal nature of historical narratives. In this conference, our aim is not merely to list these struggles, but to explore their internationalist dimensions and examine the revolutionary shift in mentality that they inspired.

Capitalism was built on the colonisation and exploitation of the Third World—Abya Yala, Africa, entire continents became sources of profit for the capitalist West. As capitalism spread, it institutionalised exploitation and assimilation, dividing and colonising the Third World in line with the geopolitical strategies of the United States and the Soviet Union. This marked a new phase of colonialism, one that relied not only on territorial control but also on economic domination.

Historically, anti-colonial struggles were not always framed from a national perspective. Earlier movements had emerged in response to forced labour, injustice and slavery. However, as capitalism developed through the exploitation of the Third World, it became clear that only the Third World could challenge and reject the capitalist world order. The capitalist system thrived on the subjugation of these regions, and whenever the Third World rebelled, the capitalist powers were forced to adjust their strategies. The end of traditional colonialism gave rise to new forms of national resistance.

This resistance extended to the new forms of colonisation, which offered political independence while ensuring continued economic dependence. Anti-colonial movements in different countries saw their struggles as interconnected, drawing inspiration from revolutionary successes in places like Cuba and Algeria, which became beacons for global anti-colonial efforts.

Algeria

Today I want to highlight Algeria as an example of anti-colonial and internationalist struggle. In the 1960s and 70s, Algeria became a focal point for revolutionaries across the Third World. All groups and movements fighting against colonialism and racism were welcome. Within a few years, Algeria became the "Red Capital" of anti-colonial struggles or “Mecca” of revolutionaries.

In 1960, as unrest grew across Africa, a dozen countries were fighting against foreign domination and apartheid. Many of these organisations found refuge in Algeria, including Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. Mandela called Algeria his second home. The ANC was the first movement to be officially welcomed in Algeria. In 1963, they opened their office there and received full support in their fight against white dictatorship.

At the time, Mandela, who initially sought to win without armed struggle, changed his perspective after witnessing the brutal realities of colonialism, particularly after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 (where 70 people were killed and 200 injured). In response, he founded an armed organisation. Mandela also received his military training from the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). The FLN's revolutionary strategy was not to achieve military victory through armed struggle alone, but to unleash political forces capable of defeating the enemy.

A revolutionary magazine published in Algeria condemned colonialism and imperialism, and regular demonstrations in support of African freedom saw thousands take to the streets. At this time, the struggle for Algeria's freedom was seen as intrinsically linked with the freedom of the people across Africa.

The Black Panthers, a revolutionary socialist organisation. in the United States, also established connections with Algeria. In 1969, after facing increasing repression in the US, the Black Panthers established their international section in Algeria. They recognised Algeria as a symbol of anti-imperialism, and it became a haven for Black liberation activists. The Panthers saw Algeria's victory against French colonialism as an inspiration for their own struggle against racial oppression in the US. Algeria provided them with a platform to advocate for international solidarity and the liberation of oppressed people worldwide.

By the 1960s, more than 30 African countries had gained political independence. In 1963, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was founded in Ethiopia, aiming for the full independence of all African nations. Algeria provided financial, diplomatic, and military support to these movements, and a coordination committee for African freedom was established there. Many military operations were directed from there as well.

African Liberation Movements Supported and Organised in Algeria

Many other movements from Africa also found support and organised in Algeria. For example, the liberation movements from Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola—from the group led by Amílcar Cabral—established connections there. Algeria maintained strong ties with Egypt, which at the time was attempting to blend socialism with Islamic principles in its pursuit of a new form of socialism. Algeria also had a solid alliance with Cuba. In conflict situations involving Algeria, Cuban fighters, along with logistical support from Egypt, provided crucial assistance. Together with Cuba, Algeria continuously offered military, diplomatic, and logistical support for other African liberation movements.

In the case of the Congo, after gaining political independence, the country remained economically and militarily dependent on Belgium. Patrice Lumumba and his group sought to break Belgium's grip, but the United States and Belgium collaborated to undermine Lumumba. Ultimately, he was tortured and killed, with complicity from his own countrymen. In response, Algeria planned a retaliatory action and supported the Communist Party in the Congo. Though the operation failed, Algeria continued to back the movement, as well as various struggles in Angola against Portuguese colonisation.

Algeria also became a base for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Thousands of Palestinians, many of whom still live there, were welcomed in Algeria. Following Israel's expansion in 1967, during its war against Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, protests erupted across the Arab world. In Algeria, massive demonstrations targeted US representations and cultural centres. The Algerian population refused to accept the defeat, and Algeria sent soldiers to Egypt, though Egypt was unable to continue the fight.

Algeria's ties to the Vietnam War and revolution were also profound. The struggle of the Vietnamese revolutionaries inspired the FLN, giving them strength and hope for their own victory. During the Vietnam War, the Black Panther Party called on the African American community to resist participation in the conflict, and many of its leaders fled to Algeria for refuge. In the 1970s, Algerians also offered sanctuary to Brazilian freedom fighters, further establishing Algeria as the epicentre of both African and global liberation movements.

After the 1965 coup against Ben Bella, internal politics in Algeria shifted, and by the early 1970s, the Algerian government began moving closer to the United States. This not only changed Algeria's economic relations but also its diplomatic and political orientation. The US sought to curb the ideological influence of socialist forces that had been attracted to Algeria. Despite this shift, for over a decade, Algeria had been the home of revolutionaries from across the world.

These examples demonstrate how anti-colonial movements forged international alliances and fought together on a global basis, with Algeria at the heart of these efforts.

Zapatista Liberation Struggle

The Zapatistas exemplify a contemporary internationalist anti-colonial movement, and their struggle stands out not only in its rejection of traditional power structures but also in its ability to adapt and innovate within the anti-colonial framework of their time. Subcomandante Marcos once described their struggle as follows: "What do the Zapatistas want? The seizure of power? No. Only something more difficult, a new world."

The EZLN's liberation struggle emerged in 1994, a time when neo-liberal globalisation and economic domination were deepening their grip on marginalised communities around the world. This context distinguishes the Zapatistas, as they rose against not only classical colonial forces but also the encroachment of neo-liberal policies that sought to strip indigenous communities of their land and autonomy. Their rebellion coincided with the implementation of NAFTA, a treaty they saw as a new form of economic colonialism that threatened indigenous livelihoods in Mexico.

In their fight against neo-liberalism, exploitation, and for gender equality, the Zapatistas broke from conventional leftist movements. They rejected both state power and the hierarchical structures typical of many revolutionary organisations, instead advocating for direct democracy and self-governance within their communities. Their focus on communal decision-making and horizontal leadership stands out as an innovative model of resistance.

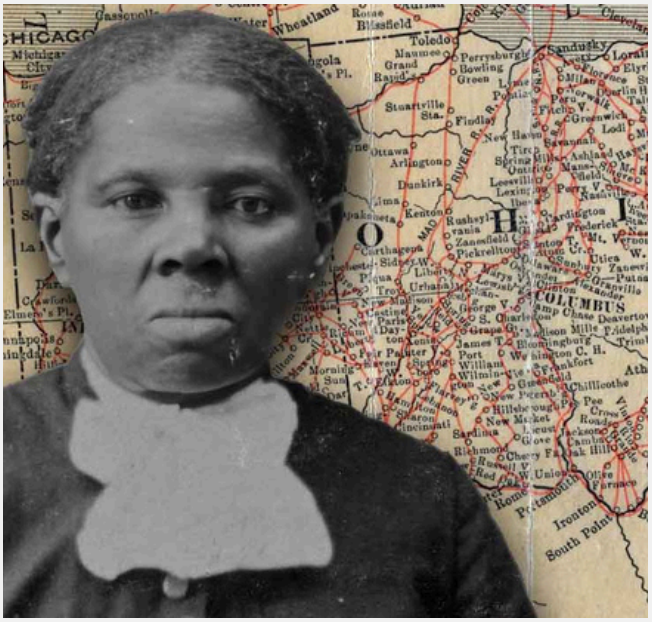
In June 2005, the Zapatistas released the "Sixth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle," proposing the anti-capitalist "Other Campaign." This campaign aimed to build an extra-parliamentary mass movement "from below and for below," uniting Mexico's marginalised populations to eventually draft and implement a new constitution.

Crucially, the Zapatistas' vision is not about seizing state power but about dismantling oppressive systems while building alternatives that prioritise indigenous sovereignty, social justice, and collective well-being.

They have hosted significant international events, including a women's gathering in Chiapas, highlighting their commitment to gender equality and the role of women in revolutionary movements. In 2021 they travelled worldwide to connect with other movements and better communicate their vision of struggle.

The Zapatistas have consistently issued communiqués, expressing solidarity with international struggles, viewing their movement as part of a larger global resistance against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchal domination.

Their ability to stand firm against the Mexican state while continuing to build autonomous, self-sustaining communities marks the Zapatistas as a powerful example of a 21st-century anti-colonial struggle. Their insistence on creating "a world where many worlds fit" remains a distinctive feature, showcasing their dedication to diversity, inclusivity, and the interconnectedness of struggles worldwide.



Women in Anti-Colonial Struggles

In the narratives of national liberation struggles, the vital role of women is often relegated to the margins. This oversight can be attributed to two main reasons. First, while national liberation may achieve political independence, it often fails to address the systemic exploitation of women, which predates and runs deeper than colonisation itself. This is why Abdullah Öcalan refers to women as the "first colony." Second, our historical frameworks and storytelling are often selective. By failing to highlight figures like Harriet Tubman[3] or Heval Sara[4], we not only erase their contributions but also obscure an entire chapter of our collective history.

Women in anti-colonial struggles epitomise internationalist anti-colonialism. They understood early on that the oppression of women was a global issue, transcending national boundaries. These women recognised that the same forces that sought to dominate their nations were also responsible for the subjugation of their gender. Their resistance, therefore, was not just about national sovereignty but also about breaking the chains of patriarchy and gender-based exploitation. This dual recognition infused their struggles with unparalleled dedication and passion.

The Kurdish women's movement, for example, offers numerous instances where women have not only participated but fundamentally shaped the course of history. Djamila of the FLN[5], Sehid Zilan[6], and the Trung sisters of Vietnam[7]—who led an army of 80,000 guerrillas against Chinese occupation—all stand as testaments to women's central role in these struggles.

*3 **Harriet Tubman** was an American abolitionist and social activist. After escaping slavery, Tubman made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people*

*4 **Heval Sara** or **Sakine Cansız** was one of the co-founders of the Kurdistan Workers' Party. A Kurdish activist in the 1980s, she was arrested and tortured by Turkish police. A close associate of Abdullah Öcalan and a senior member of the PKK, she was shot dead during the triple murder of Kurdish activists in Paris, France, on 9 January 2013, along with two other female Kurdish activists, **Fidan Doğan** and **Leyla Söylemez**.*

*5 **Djamila Bouhired** is an Algerian nationalist militant, who opposed the French colonial rule of Algeria as a member of the National Liberation Front.*

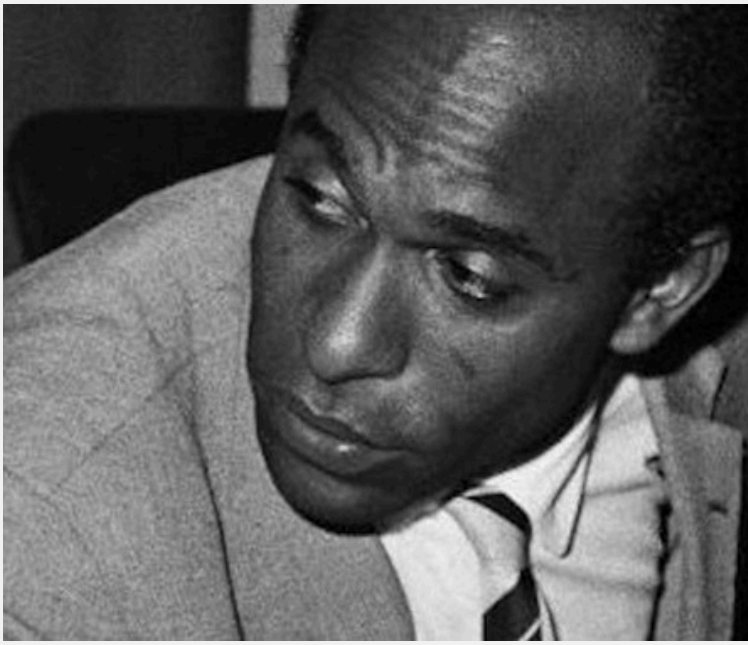
*6 **Zeynep Kınacı**, codenamed **Zilan**, was a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party known for having committed its first self sacrifice attack. The way she carried it out has influenced women's role within the PKK.*

*7 **The Trưng sisters** were Luoyue military leaders who ruled for three years after commanding a rebellion of Luoyue tribes and other tribes in AD 40 against the first Chinese domination of Vietnam*

Colonialism is not merely a relic of the past. It manifests in new forms today, making it all the more crucial to engage with the lessons of history. Women's participation in these movements underscores the importance of an internationalist perspective in fighting both colonialism and patriarchy. Through their stories, we find a deeper understanding of both the past and the ongoing struggle for true liberation.

Frantz Fanon: The revolutionary power of armed resistance in anti-colonial struggle

In this context, Frantz Fanon stands as a crucial figure. As a colonised people, it is essential to understand our own situation and sociology in order to generate solutions. Equally important is holding up a mirror to those who grow up in colonial states, which is why reading Fanon remains significant. He was one of the first to analyse both the psychology of the colonised and the coloniser. Fanon viewed colonialism as a necropolitical system of domination, which inevitably manifests through massacres and exploitation.



Fanon wrote: "The colonised who has fallen to his knees and is only able to scream must come to himself, even if this involves violence. Only then will he rise to stand at the same level as others. Between blood and rage, a new subject emerges. Through this, the human being is able to create a new human being." For Fanon, it is only possible to overcome colonialism, which is imposed through raw violence, by responding with violence. The first bullet shatters the existence crafted by exploitation, dissolving oppression and fear. In this act, the individual recreates themselves.

When the first guerrilla bullet was fired against the colonialists in Eruh and Şemdinli in Kurdistan on August 15, 1984, it fundamentally altered two things: the fear rooted in the minds of the Kurdish people and the psychology of the society. It transformed both the people and the fighters, enabling them to redefine themselves as human beings.

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The ideas of Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg intersect with Fanon's critique of nationalism. Both Lenin and Luxemburg engaged in significant debates on the national question. While Luxemburg recognised the dangers posed by nation-states to socialism and emphasised the need for stronger international consciousness, she lacked concrete solutions to counter centralised power. Lenin, on the other hand, understood colonialism's many faces and recognised that denying self-determination essentially supported the dominance of ruling nations. For both thinkers, nationalism was a complex force—one that could either facilitate liberation or reinforce new forms of oppression.

However, the unresolved tensions in their debates raise the question: what is the solution for freedom and the anti-colonial struggle today?

Beyond the Nation-State: A Revolutionary Path to True Liberation

Through our own experiences and reflection, we have come to realise that Nation-Statism is fundamentally anti-socialist and anti-democratic. The collapse of real-socialism forced us to confront the nation-state concept, compelling us to delve deeper into the nature of state power. Historically, nation-states emerged to secure capital and entrench capitalist dominance. This is why the nation-state has become the most important tool of capitalist hegemony. As such, true freedom cannot be found within the constraints of nation-states, and socialism must break free from the limitations of this model.

Socialism, as an anti-capitalist system, cannot rely on the nation-state model. To limit socialism within the confines of a centralist nation-state is a fundamental mistake. Nation-states, by their very nature, cannot be a solution for socialists.

We must broaden our thinking beyond the creation of miniature nation-states for the oppressed, which often end up serving only the bourgeoisie—the same upper class that colonialism helped to form. Many liberation struggles have shown that exploitation and grievances do not end with independence. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify the revolutionary task. After liberation, socio-political and economic consciousness must dismantle national consciousness. Once freed, societies will enter a fierce competition between capitalism and socialism.

To avoid falling into the trap of capitalist modernity, as many movements have done throughout history, we must work harder than ever to change the mentality of the people.

Therefore it is necessary to:

1. Politicise the masses

2. Decentralise the revolutionary movement through a strict rotation of leadership and grassroots involvement

3. Develop an economic program focused on wealth distribution and reshaping social relations

Political consciousness must be intertwined with a deep, active engagement with the people. As Abdullah Öcalan highlights, the goal is to cultivate a political and ethical society. Initially, many believed that an independent state would bring freedom, but statehood often stands in direct contradiction to real democracy. Instead, we must build a moral, political society based on participation and awareness.

Fanon, like Abdullah Öcalan, emphasises that decolonisation is only the first step toward true freedom. While Fanon speaks of a "new nation," we talk about the concept of a Democratic Nation. This is a topic that warrants further exploration, but for now, it's important to note that while national liberation is necessary in colonial struggles, the formation of a state often serves as a means of accumulating power.

Overcoming colonial mentalities: Class Suicide

How can we ensure that our revolution does not fall under the influence of the wrong mentality?
Fanon's analysis, as well as our own anti-colonial experiences, show that many struggles begin with individuals from colonised nations who attend the universities of colonial powers. There, they are exposed to the harsh realities of colonialism. This creates a deep internal contradiction, as the colonised often face their greatest conflict while being far from home and immersed in the education system of the colonial state.

At this point, each individual is confronted with a choice: to either assimilate into the system or to struggle against it. However, the challenge arises when those who have been educated abroad return to work for the revolution while still operating from the perspective of their political and class privilege. This disconnect can lead to problems, as their social reality no longer aligns with that of the people they are meant to serve.

Abdullah Öcalan recognised this issue and offered solutions through personal analysis. In the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, there is a strong focus on self-criticism and personal reflection to overcome the influence of the state mentality and colonialism. A key revolutionary task is to create a free mindset and develop mechanisms that resist behaviours rooted in capitalist modernity, patriarchy, and the state system. This means engaging directly with national struggles and learning from society. This transformative process is also referred to as "class suicide.".

It has been pointed out that when people from Europe or other colonial backgrounds join our revolution, their Euro-centric and neo-colonial mentalities could pose a problem. But through self-criticism, analysis, and collective mechanisms, we believe it is possible for everyone to liberate themselves from these influences. In fact, such personal transformation is essential; it is a direct response to imperialism and a profound act of internationalism. There is no greater self-criticism or challenge to colonial history than to join revolutionary struggles in anti-colonial movements.

Our task is to defend revolutionary spaces, especially where capitalist modernity is weakest. In these places, we must reconnect with ourselves and, if necessary, unlearn everything shaped by the state system. Today, our biggest challenge is that capitalist modernity has stripped away our freedom and communal values.

This is why we must learn from the Zapatistas, the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, and other indigenous peoples. We must reconnect with nature and rediscover our true realities. As Sartre said: "That's another story. The story of the people. Time feeds, I am sure we will join those who write this history".

Description and Historical Preconditions of 1968

Rather than getting lost in a detailed account of everything that happened, our goal should be to identify what we can learn from historical experiences and how they can inform our strategies for the future. Our approach should always be twofold: deepening our understanding of these events while connecting them to our present reality, and using that knowledge to shape our future strategies.

The late 60's was a time period with many different descriptions: the Wind of '68, the 1968 Revolution, the Protests of 1968, the Year of Revolt, the Year of the Barricades. One of the first contradictions we encounter is in how people name this period—some call the period a revolutionary time, others refer to it as a time of revolts. Understanding this period of revolution in socialist history requires a broader perspective. It was not confined to one region or nation; it was a global movement that unfolded over an extended period. While in Western countries, it may seem like a product of earlier historical moments, revolts were happening simultaneously and in connection all over the world.

We need to examine the generation that led these predominantly student and youth revolts. In the context of the Cold War, post-World War II, and the rise of welfare states, a new generation—often referred to as the 'baby-boomer' generation—was emerging. This generation rejected the values of the older generations. They were willing to confront both their governments and society at large, embracing a vision of radical change that would leave a lasting impact on global politics and culture.

On a global scale, 1968 was marked by an escalation of social conflicts characterised by protests against state and bureaucratic power. While the specifics varied from country to country, common threads existed, especially in industrialised nations. There was a widespread rejection of the capitalist consumerism that had grown after WWII, as well as dissatisfaction with authority in general. This period also saw a rejection of both Western capitalism and Soviet-style socialism, as people searched for a 'third way.' It was a time of profound questioning and exploration, later referred to as the emergence of the 'New Left.'

In essence, the 1968 Movement was about finding alternatives to the systems that dominated the post-war world—both politically and culturally. The significance of this movement lies not just in the events themselves, but in the way they prompted a generation to rethink its future and seek something fundamentally different.

One of the common reasons for the revolts—and I would call them more revolts than revolutions, because while there was a revolutionary spirit and energy, it never quite reached the level needed for a full-scale revolution—was the global nature of the unrest. These widespread revolts did carry revolutionary potential. A significant topic was anti-colonial struggles and the connections that united them. A prime example was the Vietnam War, a moment when American imperialism was vividly displayed to the world, and people stood firmly against it.

What made this period unique was that, for the first time in history, television—now commonly found in homes—brought global events into people's living rooms. The brutality of the U.S. military in Vietnam and the police crackdowns on protesters were broadcast to a wide audience, creating a shared awareness that helped to connect people across borders. This also led to states' growing need for stricter censorship in the media. After 1968, governments realised the importance of controlling the narrative through the media.

In this period, various political and ideological currents emerged that we now associate with the 'New Left.' There was a spirit of spontaneity and lofty expectations for change. Some of the most famous slogans that captured this energy were: "All power to the imagination," "It is forbidden to forbid," "Be realistic, demand the impossible," "We want the world, and we want it now," and "Don't trust anyone over 30." Another popular slogan was, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." These slogans give us a sense of the mood and ideals of the movement on a global scale.

To understand this movement more thoroughly, we need to also consider how it played out locally, as each country and movement had its own specific conditions and differences. I will provide only a few key examples of these local contexts.

France

France is crucial to discuss because it is often referred to as the heart of the movement's spirit, especially in the context of Western countries. At the time, there was a global crisis in higher education, which led students to take to the streets in protest. What started as a student-led demonstration quickly escalated into a mass movement, growing into a popular rebellion involving over 11 million people. One of the key moments in the French uprising was when workers joined the students, transforming the protest from a student issue to a broad-based social movement. While France wasn't facing an economic crisis like other nations, the workers, who had long been oppressed, saw this as an opportunity to assert their identity.

On May 30th, a general strike brought the country to a standstill. Workers from all sectors, including airports and other key industries, joined in, and the whole nation essentially collapsed. At this point, it seemed as though the movement was on the verge of toppling the government and the people would take power into their own hands. The situation became so intense that the President of France had to be evacuated. In this critical moment, people began taking matters into their own hands—regulating food prices, making efforts to establish a national assembly, and drawing inspiration from the Paris Commune by organising themselves. It wasn't just about protests any more; people were already engaging in practical activities like initiating construction projects, showing a real attempt to build a new social order from the ground up.

However, despite this revolutionary momentum, the popular movement was ultimately undermined by the French Communist Party and the trade unions, both of which betrayed the cause. The state negotiated the Grenelle Accords, which offered modest work reforms and economic concessions. Many workers returned to their jobs, and the revolutionary fervour began to fade. Following this, a new parliamentary election strengthened the Gaullist Party, and the revolutionary moment in France dissolved.

Czechoslovakia

The Prague Spring of 1968 in Czechoslovakia is another critical moment to discuss. Czechoslovakia was part of the Eastern Bloc, under heavy Soviet influence, and the events that took place there are a powerful example of how history has to be analysed with a critical eye. It's important not to idealise the past, but to take a clear and reflective approach. In 1968, a reformist movement known as "Socialism with a Human Face," led by Alexander Dubček, aimed to liberalise the country's communist system and reduce the oppressive and dogmatic nature of Stalinism. There were significant student rebellions and public demands for change, which reflected a broader desire for more democratic and progressive socialism.

Dubček, the leader of the Communist Party who had resisted the pro-Nazi Slovak regime during WWII, now faced mounting pressure as the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact were unwilling to tolerate these reforms. In August 1968, Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. They replaced the government that had been trying to listen to the people's demands for change. The Soviet intervention abruptly halted this attempt at reform and silenced the uprising, crushing the Prague Spring and forcing a return to hardline policies. This invasion led to a period of "normalisation," during which Czechoslovakia reverted to strict, Stalinist-style control.

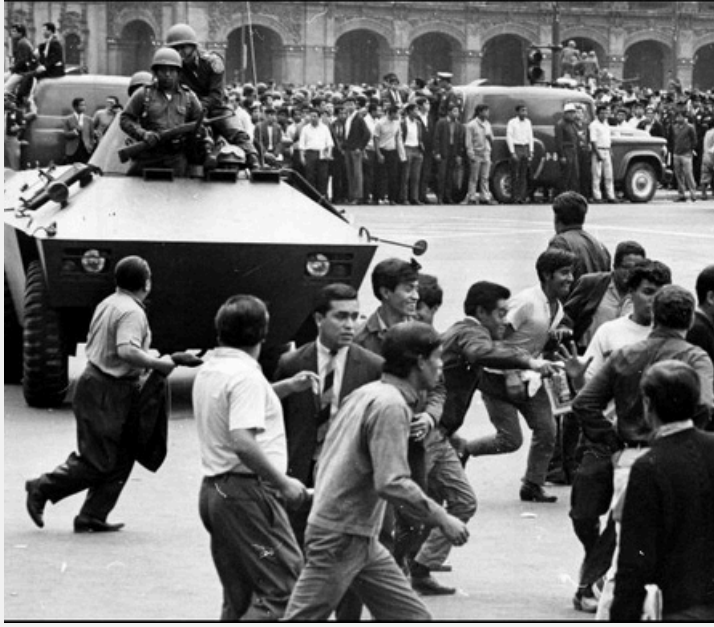
This sparked widespread discontent. One of the most symbolic acts of protest was by a student named Jan Palach, who burned himself to death in 1969 as an act of resistance against the Soviet invasion and dictatorship. These examples demonstrate the importance of looking at history through the lens of local experiences, acknowledging both the resistance movements and the harsh repressive responses they faced.

This was part of a larger pattern seen throughout Eastern Europe, such as the earlier uprising in Hungary in 1956, where local socialist forces also clashed with oppressive Stalinist forces.

Portugal

During these years Portugal endured a fascist dictatorship for 48 years, the longest in Europe, while the population lived in poverty. At the same time, independence movements began to surface in its colonies, such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Timor-Leste, and Macau. During this period, the only significant organisation to survive the dictatorship was the Communist Party, bolstered by Soviet support, however, in the 1960s, the communists began to split from it. They realised that the power of the fascist regime in Portugal was deriving from its colonial dominance, which involved even more brutal exploitation in the colonies. They understood that an armed struggle, in alliance with anti-colonial movements, against both the regime and colonial forces was essential. This collaboration initiated armed actions against the regime, leading Portuguese soldiers to rebel and ultimately contributing to the regime's collapse and the liberation of the colonies. This example illustrates how struggles from within and outside empires can converge to achieve liberation.

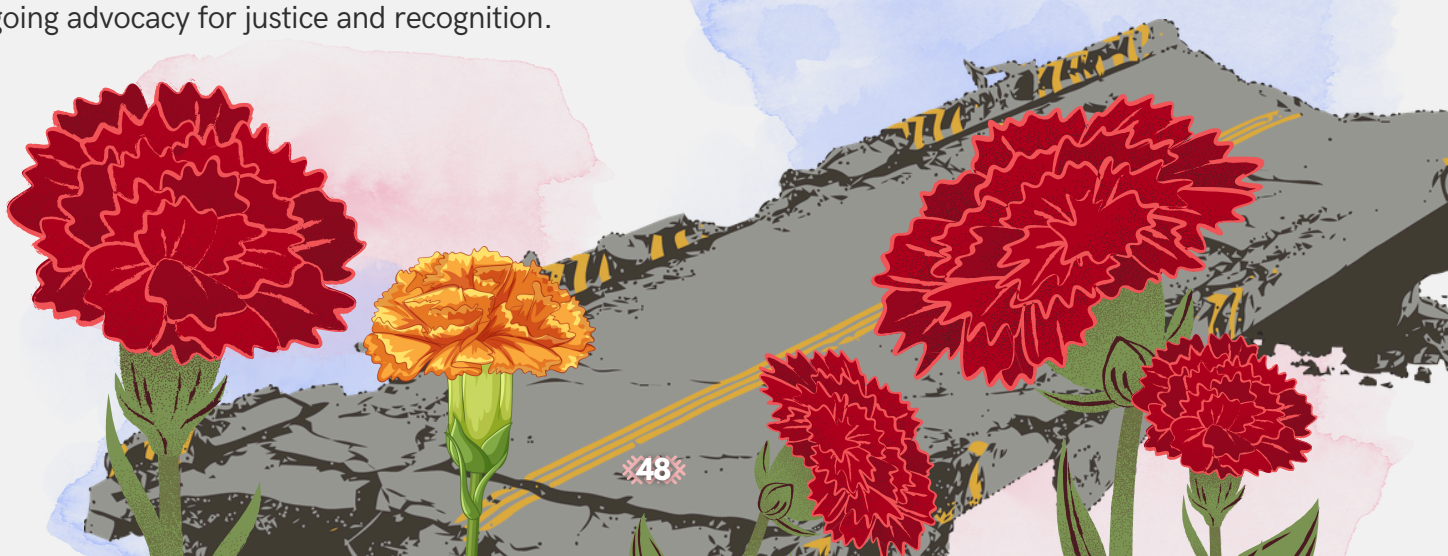
North America



In Mexico, the '68 movement was marked by significant unrest and protest against systemic injustices. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had maintained power for over 40 years under the leadership of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. A large student protest emerged, fuelled by widespread social injustices, anti-colonial sentiments, and opposition to the Vietnam War, among other local struggles. This movement faced one of the most brutal repressions of the entire '68 global movement, culminating in the Tlatelolco massacre at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Officially over 200 people were killed, yet the true death toll remains uncertain, as many victims were buried in mass graves.

The '68 movement in Mexico had far-reaching implications that extended beyond urban student protests, significantly impacting indigenous and popular movements across the country. This period galvanised not only urban students but also marginalised indigenous groups, who recognised parallels between their struggles and the student movement's demands for social justice, land rights, and political representation. Indigenous activists began to mobilise more vocally, emphasising unity in addressing systemic inequalities. The cultural expressions that emerged during this time, including music and art, often incorporated indigenous themes, fostering a cultural renaissance that celebrated indigenous identities. In the wake of the movement's repression, indigenous communities were inspired to advocate for their rights, leading to the formation of organisations focused on land reform and cultural preservation. This laid the groundwork for significant changes in policy and societal attitudes regarding indigenous rights in Mexico. The legacy of the '68 movement would continue to resonate, influencing subsequent movements, including the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994, which sought to address issues of land, autonomy, and indigenous rights. Ultimately, the '68 movement not only highlighted the interconnectedness of various social struggles but also helped cultivate a sense of pride and resilience among marginalised communities, paving the way for ongoing advocacy for justice and recognition.

In the United States, the '68 movement also manifested through various social and political struggles. The Black Panther Party emerged during this time, alongside the environmental movement and the tumultuous events surrounding the assassination of Malcolm X. These movements were interconnected, each contributing to a broader framework of liberation politics. Prominent leaders who sought social change were often targeted and assassinated, demonstrating the significant risks associated with involvement in these movements. Notably, the progressive US presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy who travelled to Algeria, seeking to understand and engage with liberation movements globally, was also assassinated.



Reflecting on whether the '68 movement succeeded as a revolution, it's clear that while it fostered substantial cultural impacts, it did not lead to widespread social change. Many movements were ultimately dissolved, and the hoped-for transformations did not fully materialise. However, the era did mark a pivotal moment for cultural shifts, including sexual liberation and the emergence of new identities. This period sparked the emergence of identity politics, and brought issues such as environmentalism and gender oppression to the forefront. One of the most significant legacies of the '68 movement was the strengthening of feminism, which emerged as a powerful force during this time and continued to evolve historically and politically in subsequent years.

Examining the example of France, we can extract valuable lessons about the necessity of unity among various movements and approaches. One notable downfall that persists today is the division among these movements. After the '68 movement, although there was a cultural revolution, liberalism gained significant traction, leading to a fragmentation of critical issues like gender equality and environmentalism into separate movements instead of creating a common line. This fragmentation, particularly in the Western world, hinders the development of a cohesive revolutionary strategy. It is essential to address this division in our discussions, as we need to rediscover a common path that allows us to materialise. a historical and revolutionary experience, preventing it from dissolving over time. While there is a wealth of shared struggles, movements remain disconnected and often reactionary rather than revolutionary in their solutions.

Looking at the Soviet Union and the bleak circumstances faced by people in post-Soviet countries, we see critical lessons to learn. The hope for social or revolutionary solutions in these regions is minimal, leaving a vacuum that allows religious fundamentalism and proto-capitalism to take hold more easily.

This presentation focuses not only on these historical moments but also on the subsequent movements they inspired, both its shortcomings and its strengths, including the rise of environmental activism, the new wave of feminism, and various democratic movements. Although we cannot cover every detail, I encourage readers to make these connections themselves. The legacy of '68 remains visible today, with many organisations emerging from the student movement, such as the RAF[8], Tupamaros in the Americas[9], and the Brigate Rosse[10] in Italy. Members of these movements, inspired by the spirit of '68, made significant strides toward radical organisation, particularly within anti-colonial and national liberation movements.

The environmental movement is crucial in this context. We need to redefine the proletarian struggle to include an environmental dimension, acknowledging that the ecological crises we face will increasingly impact diverse populations. This requires a departure from viewing environmental issues purely through a scientific lens, which often disconnects the natural environment from social relations.

8 ***The Red Army Faction****, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group or Baader-Meinhof Gang, was a West German far-left militant group founded in 1970 and active until 1998*
9 ***Tupamaros*** *was a Marxist-Leninist urban guerrilla group that operated in Uruguay during the 1960s and 1970s*
10 ***The Red Brigades*** *were an Italian far-left Marxist-Leninist militant group.*

As a result of the growing industrialisation of societies, the '60s and '70s witnessed ecological incidents such as the Chernobyl disaster and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, highlighting pollution and other problems directly linked to capitalism. To address these challenges, we must create social and local solutions; failing to do so will hinder our ability to resolve environmental issues effectively.

As Murray Bookchin noted in his approach to social ecology, "If the logos of proletarian radicalism was the factory, the logos of the ecological movement would be the community; the neighbourhood, the town, the municipality." This underscores the need to intertwine our social and environmental struggles to build a more just and sustainable future.

In conclusion, the '68 movement represents a watershed moment in global history, characterised by widespread social unrest, cultural shifts, and the emergence of diverse liberation movements. While it fell short of achieving a complete revolutionary transformation, its legacy continues to resonate today, influencing contemporary struggles for social justice, feminism, and environmental activism. The movement revealed the interconnectedness of various issues, underscoring the need for solidarity among different groups to address systemic inequalities effectively. As we reflect on the lessons learned from '68, it is crucial to unite our efforts and recognise that the fight for change is ongoing. By embracing the spirit of that era, we can build upon its achievements and work towards a more equitable and sustainable future.

7. Outlook: Democratic Confederalism - A Perspective for Internationalism and Women's Liberation in the 21st Century

The experiences of the three Internationals, real-socialism, anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles in the 19th and 20thcentury have shown us that neither social liberation nor national liberation can be realised without women's liberation. Although hundreds of thousands of women participated in these liberation struggles their dreams of a free, dignified life remained unfulfilled. The strategies of uniting the workers of all countries for class liberation or leading the struggle for national liberation against imperialist exploitation, have largely disregarded the reality of women as 'the first oppressed class' or 'the oldest colony', as Abdullah Öcalan stated. From this he concluded that such a historical and profound contradiction as the gender contradiction between the dominant man and enslaved woman cannot be dealt with as a 'side-issue', but requires special and organised efforts to overcome it.

The second wave of feminist struggles and movements that evolved as a part and driving force of the 1968 movement emphasised the mechanisms and historical continuity of patriarchy. Through women's communal organising as well as international campaigns and networks under slogans like 'sisterhood is global', 'the private is political', 'my body, my choice' or 'equal pay for equal work' women from all continents joined their voices and forces in the struggle against sexist violence, discrimination and legislation. The patriarchal structures and gender roles within family, society and state institutions were challenged as well as their continuity in socialist organisations and the students' movement. In addition, Black feminists and other revolutionary women analysed the relationships between patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism. They concluded that a consistent women's liberation struggle must likewise include the struggle against all forms of oppression and exploitation. On this basis many women's groups and organisations also played an important role in worldwide struggles for peace, democracy and ecology. Nevertheless, although the feminist movement became an important international social and political force in the 1970s and 80s, it failed to stop feminicides and the multilayered exploitation of women around the world, as well as failing to avert the spread of capitalist modernity and imperialist wars. As the feminist movement split more and more into competing ideological factions, since the 1990s its mainstream was absorbed by the liberal system and marginalised by the individualist lifestyle of capitalist modernity.

Against this background, Abdullah Öcalan's conclusion: "The 21st century shall be the century of women's liberation,"encompasses a revolutionary internationalist program and strategy for the 21st century. It is based on concepts for realising a women's revolution as the core of social liberation that Abdullah Öcalan has been developing since the mid-1990s. We believe that these concepts which have guided the organising and struggle of the women's freedom movement in Kurdistan over the past three decades are of the utmost importance for internationalist works and organising.

In the reality of war and occupation the need of women's self-defence was met by building up a women's army in the mountains of Kurdistan. This was the first step for women not only to lead their fight against colonial attacks by themselves, but also to organise their lives and struggle autonomously. Through this, women got to know their collective strength and developed their strategy, tactics and actions by educating themselves and one another. In a world that is dominated by rape culture and systematic feminicides, women's ability of self-defence is a question of vital importance worldwide. Self-defence is not restricted to knowing how to use arms. Moreover, women's self-defence means to create awareness and organisation to protect women's lives and dignity according to the needs and realities in different regions of the world.

The Theory of Separation became an important theoretical framework to overcome the constant influence of patriarchal dominance. For women this means to free themselves from physical, mental, and emotional violence and dependencies on men by developing self-consciousness and trust among women. Together with this, the Women's Liberation Ideologyillustrated by Abdullah Öcalan on 8 March 1998 comprises important tools and principles for women's liberation in Kurdistan as well as at the international level:
Its principle of Welatparezî[11] involves establishing a loving and conscious relationship with our culture, history, and land as the basis for resistance against colonialism, assimilation, and alienation. It is based on an ecological and internationalist understanding of the appreciation of unity in diversity.

The principle of Free Thought and Free Will means freeing our minds from patriarchal and colonial concepts. This includes confidently expressing our opinions and developing solutions that go beyond the prefabricated, alleged choices the system offers us.

The principle of Organising means to build and strengthen our collective will as women. Being organised gives us the strength to take action and determine our lives. This is the basis for advancing the democratic communal self-organisation of our societies, and to challenge the ruling system.

The principle of Struggle arises from the realisation that patriarchal rulers will never act in favour of women and that capitalists will never selflessly sacrifice their profits for the welfare of the people. According to changing conditions we need to develop and implement different methods of struggle on regional and international levels to overcome the system of oppression and exploitation. The forms of struggle can include democratic politics, mass mobilisations, awareness raising campaigns and educations as well strike actions or uprisings.

The principle of Ethics and Aesthetics expresses our understanding of beauty and justice. It is based on the ethical unity of our goals and methods of struggle, as well as on the creation and expression of values of freedom. We not only fight against the system of oppression, but also strive to build social alternatives based on a culture of solidarity, mutual respect, and friendship.

The Women's Liberation Ideology was the foundation for establishing a women's party and the development of a manifesto for women's liberation in Kurdistan. In the cause of continuing discussions about how women want to live, and what kind of society they desire, the Kurdish women's freedom movement has also drafted a Social Contract for Women.Through this process, women strive to determine their own lives and abolish all unilateral patriarchal contracts and laws imposed on them. In this sense, the Women's Liberation Ideology also comprises the basis for the implementation of Abdullah Öcalan's paradigm of a democratic, ecological society based on women's liberation. In this way, the concept of Killing the Dominant Man (which Abdullah Öcalan calls "the basic principle of socialism. That is about killing power, about killing one-sided domination and inequality, about killing intolerance. It is even about killing fascism, dictatorship, despotism")[12] has offered a strong approach to fight and deconstruct patriarchal mentality. It stresses the responsibility of men, especially those who want to call themselves revolutionaries to question and overcome sexist attitudes in their own personalities. The transformation of men according to socialist principles, including the respect of women's will and autonomous organisation, is an important precondition for redefining gender relations.

11 Kurdish term for ***"defending and loving the land"***
12 ***Mahir Sayın: Abdullah Öcalan ne diyor?*** *Erkeği Öldürmek, Toprak Publications, 1997*

The concept Hevjiyana Azad[13], which can be translated as "free communal life" or "free and equal partnership" requiresovercoming the patriarchal mentality and attitudes of the dichotomy of dominant men and oppressed women. Only by overcoming the logic, structures and institutions that perceive women as sexual objects and property can Hevjiyana Azador a true comradeship between men and women be achieved. To materialise this, Abdullah Öcalan developed certain criteria that need to be considered by men and women. While he stresses that Hevjiyana Azad is not a private or exclusive relation between an individual man and a woman, but established socially, he also evaluates the realisation of free and equal relations between men and women in all fields of life, as a main pillar of a democratic nation and socialist society.

"By Hevjiyana Azad, I am not talking about a classic husband-wife relationship or similar modern, postmodern, disguised marriage relationship. The Free Communal Life I mentioned is the way of life in which both sexes rebuild life in every aspect on the basis of equality and freedom. Since person or society cannot exist out of time and space, men and women have to liberate time and space together with themselves, so that love and affection can bloom in it."[14]

These concepts have nourished the Women's Revolution and the Jin Jiyan Azadî Uprisings, which are at the core of the construction of democratic confederal structures of women's and people's self-administration in Kurdistan. They embody responses to humanity's aspiration for a life of freedom and dignity - a reality and quest that have deep historical roots and unite women and societies around the world.

Global Historical Foundations of the Women's Revolution

Traces of women centred clans and natural societies, based on communal values, gift economy, and a holisticunderstanding of life and the universe as sacred creations of mother goddesses can be found throughout the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia. Archaeological, cultural and linguistic relicts, social customs, oral histories and mythologies reveal the central role of women in organising solidarity-based communities, creating knowledge, culture and essentials of life. These relicts of an ancient women's revolution that gave meaning to life and built societies on the basis of mutual respect, common needs and justice can be found in all regions around the globe. They compose the sources of the flowing river of democratic modernity. By recognising and giving meaning to these traces in the past and present of our societies, we can dismantle the patriarchal myths in religion, philosophy and sciences that have shaped the dominant male mentality. Hereby, we understand that the actual development of humanity is neither a result of men's physical strength nor has been created by state civilisations, wars or class struggles. At the same time, we see that the dominant system of patriarchy and rape culture, which has deeply violated women's existence and neglects women's identities became the historical blueprint for all hierarchies, class division, racism and the colonisation of societies, land and nature.

*13 **"Hev"** means "together", **"jiyan"** is "life" and **"azad"** is "free". The concept was introduced by Abdullah Öcalan in the 5th volume of the Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization in 2010*
14 From notes of talks with Abdullah Öcalan on Imrali

By realising this, it becomes obvious that the ruling system of oppression has not always existed and therefore should not exist forever. The nature of social relationships, especially relationships between women and men, as well as relationships between different social groups, cultural and religious communities, are shaped by narratives and traditions that have been conceived and practised by humans. This means that these relationships can also be reimagined, reinterpreted, and changed.

Despite the deep rupture caused by the institutionalisation of patriarchy in the mindsets and all areas of life throughout history and across societies, the history and "her stories" of women's freedom struggles, communal resistances, cooperation, learning, and organising over the millennia have also left their marks on the individual and collective memory of women in all regions of the world. From the tough battle of Inanna against Enki in the Babylonian Era totheological and philosophical communes in women's monasteries, from the Beguine movement in central Europe to the Bacilar[15] (Bacıyan-ı Rum) movement in Anatolia in the Middle Ages, from the self-defence struggles of indigenous women against colonisation in Africa, Asia, America, and Australia to armed resistances against fascist dictatorships, through to mass mobilisations against slavery, apartheid and trafficking, women can rely on a rich legacy of regional, continental and intercontinental struggles to build a community-based internationalism in the 21st century.

Turning Sparks of Hope into International Alliances

Since the beginning of the 21st century we have witnessed a new wave of global women's mobilisations, debates and conferences to build and strengthen international women's alliances. The Kurdish women's freedom movement has been involved in many of them, offering inspiration and connection to different initiatives to advance the women's liberation struggle with an internationalist perspective.

Starting with the World Women's Marches in the year 2000, women began to take to the streets, again. They organised internationally, coordinating mobilisations and actions to resist capitalist exploitation, land grabbing, imperialist wars and all forms of violence against women. With Global Women's Strikes, women rebelled against the double exploitation of women's labour. With mass demonstrations under the slogan Ni una menos! and global dance actions such as One Billion Rising or Las Tesas women denounce sexist violence and feminicides. Since 2011, World Women's Conferences have been organised in various countries such as Venezuela, Nepal, and Tunisia. The founding congress of the International Women's Alliance (IWA) took place in the Philippines, with the aim of Advancing the global, militant women's movement. At the same time a multitude of initiatives have emerged to discuss feminist manifestos for the 21st century.

15 Bacılar-ı Rum (literally "Sisters of Rûm") refers to a women's organization active in Anatolia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Examples include the Feminism for the 99% Manifesto[16], the Transnational Feminist Manifesto[17], and the ongoing process for drafting a Feminist Manifesto of the Global South[18]. A common feature of all these initiatives is the critique of liberal feminism, which has contributed to consolidate capitalist modernity and exploitation. Therefore these initiatives aim to revitalise feminism with an anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, ecological, internationalist, and socialist perspective.

At the same time, the Kurdish women's movement developed a proposal to work together with various women, women's collectives, and movements to weave networks of a World Women's Democratic Confederalism. This proposal was presented and widely discussed at the international Women Weaving the Future conferences in Frankfurt in 2018 and Berlin in 2022 under the motto "Our Revolution – Liberating Life."[19] The proposal was also discussed at regional forums such as the Middle East and North Africa Women's Conferences, which took place in Amed in 2013 and Beirut in 2021, and approved in Suleymania in 2025. Since then, solid networks of international women's solidarity are being built step-by-step. During the discussion processes, a consensus emerged that autonomous, confederal women's organisation based on the Jin Jiyan Azadî philosophy offers the option of waging an effective struggle against patriarchal, fascist ideologies and regimes by jointly organising the diverse local initiatives and regional networks of women.

Democratic Confederalism – Internationalism of the 21st Century

The rich experiences of the freedom struggle and women's movement in Kurdistan also comprise important perspectives for realising democratic socialism and internationalism in the 21st century. Abdullah Öcalan's analyses of the reasons for the collapse of real-socialism are also important for a reconsideration of internationalism. While analysing the nation-state, industrialism and capitalism as three pillars of capitalist modernity, he proposes Democratic Confederalism of democratic nations, communal eco-economy and democratic society as alternatives.

16 ***Cinzia Arruzza****, Tithi Bhattacharya, Nancy Fraser et al.,* ***Feminism for the 99%****: A Manifesto, Verso, London / New York, 2019*
17 https://radicalwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CrossBorderFeministManifesto.pdf
18 https://southfeministmanifesto.org
19 https://womenweavingfuture.org

Our internationalist comrade Ş. Nûdem (Uta Schneiderbanger) realised in March 2005, that the democratic confederation of the peoples offers a 'way out of the dilemma', as she wrote in an article:

"The core of the new ideas that Abdullah Öcalan analyses in all aspects and constantly develops in his defence writingswritten in solitary confinement is based on strengthening the so-called third sector, i.e., society organisation in all areas of life. This form of grassroots democracy is intended to enable the people to become active in social and political terms and, with increasing organisation and awareness, to take over essential functions of the supposedly all-powerful state itself. As a counterweight to the ruling powers in the Middle East, Abdullah Öcalan proposes the formation of a confederation of peoples, independent from state and government. This redefinition of internationalism, taking into account the social reality and history of the Middle East, has enormous political explosive power that could have global implications."[20]

The experiences of the three Internationals reflect the fundamental shortcomings of real-socialist theory and practice. To illustrate this we can highlight four points that are essential for the internationalist organisation and realisation of democratic socialism in the 21st century:

1- The historical and sociological analysis of the gender contradiction as the cause and solution of all power relations is of essential importance for overcoming them. The Marxist approach of the three Internationals was based on declaring the class contradiction between wage labour and capital to be the main contradiction and the patriarchal oppression of women to be a secondary or 'side issue'. This failed to recognise that the subjugation and exploitation of women, which historically and currently has gone hand-in-hand with the destruction of communal social structures, is the stem cell of all forms of domination. As long as the patriarchal mentality and the institutions based on it, namely the family and the state, are not radically criticised and transformed, democratic change cannot take place through the equal participation of women in politics and organisations alone.

The dissolution of the three Internationals confirm the theses formulated by Abdullah Öcalan: "Socialism can only be achieved through women's liberation. One cannot be a socialist without women's freedom. There can be no socialism. One cannot go for socialism without democracy."[21]

While sexism was developed and globalised as an ideology to divide women and societies, the Women's Liberation Ideology, has the potential to collectively rethink and redesign internationalist and socialist ways of life and relationships through processes of self-actualisation and organisation among women everywhere in the world.

20 ***Uta Schneiderbanger: Ausweg aus dem Dilemma: Die demokratische Konföderation der Völker - Eine Frauensichtreise durch die Türkei****, die EU und den ganzen Rest, Cenî Bületin, Nr. 9, 10. März 2005*

21 Quote of ***Abdullah Öcalan's message on 8 March 2025****: „Sosyalizme kadın özgürlüğünden gidilir. Kadın özgürlüğü olmadan sosyalist olunmaz. Sosyalizm olmaz. Demokrasi olmadan sosyalizme gidilemez."*

2- The concept of democratic modernity gives us the ability to constructively discuss ideological contradictions and to utilise the potential of different approaches for building democratic socialism. One of the main reasons for the failure of the three Internationals was the inability of the anti-system forces to develop a productive way of dealing with ideological differences and a democratic culture of discussion. Although the rejection of domination and the search for freedom and alternatives have been joint quests of socialist, communist, anarchist, feminist, and ecological organisations, as well as diverse democratic civil, religious, cultural, and national liberation movements, the respective movements often invested more energy in competing with each other than in the common struggle against the oppressive system.

The concept of democratic modernity developed by Abdullah Öcalan offers an alternative approach that is based on a critical and self-critical assessment of the mistakes, achievements, and potential for freedom of various ideological views. Instead of focusing on a specific label, he analyses the theory and practice of the respective movements and questions the extent to which they have contributed to their claim of liberating people and society. His methodology is based on questioning the different theories on the basis of their practice. On the one hand, he emphasises the need to always preserve the ethical unity of revolutionary goals and means. On the other hand, he elaborates on why the diverse system-critical movements were ultimately unable to prevent themselves from being drawn into the liberalist track of capitalist modernity. This method of open critical and self-critical reflection opens up the possibility, to learn about different system-critical ways of thinking, their achievements, errors, and obstacles on local and international levels. Such a democratic culture of discussion, in which we see each other as comrades on a path towards a common goal, opens up the possibility to concentrate on our efforts and to join our forces for building free, democratic societies connected through cooperation and solidarity.

3- The democratic nation represents both a philosophy and strategy as well as a solution model. It is an alternative to the failed approach of the three Internationals, which stated that capitalism would be abolished through the seizure of power by exploited classes and that oppressed nations would be liberated through the establishment of an independent nation-state. A fundamental mistake was the assumption that social developments would follow "natural laws" leading to steady progress. This approach failed to recognise that nation-states are inherent components of capitalist modernity and that the misery generated by capitalism does not inevitably lead to a socialist revolution. Moreover, nation-states were constructed on the basis of nationalist ideologies for the exercise of patriarchal and colonial rule. Therefore, they are contrary to the goal of building a socialist society.

Workers of all countries, blinded by nationalist propaganda and brought into dependence by impoverishment, could thus be turned into soldiers of competing nation-states and be sent to war for capitalist profits. Even the achievement of an independent nation-state, which was formulated as the goal of anti-colonial liberation struggles, could not prevent new power elites from replacing the former colonial rulers. The majority of society - especially women – still remained excluded from political discussion and decision-making processes. Indigenous cultures and forms of organisation were discriminated against, assimilated, and combated as being "backward."

The concept of the democratic nation developed by Abdullah Öcalan and implemented in the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is an alternative to the nation-state. It is based on a model of direct democracy, and confederal self-governance of society. This prevents one old power elite from being replaced by a new one. Nationalism and sectarian conflicts are prevented by the fact that, on the basis of democratic principles and traditions, the various cultural, ethnic, and faith communities and social movements organise themselves both autonomously and collectively, thus shaping social and political life together. This begins with the organisation of communes at the local level, which are connected with each other and cooperate regionally and interregionally in peoples' councils. A "World Confederation of Democratic Nations," which Abdullah Öcalan proposes as an alternative to the United Nations, includes the option for all ethnic, cultural, religious, and social communities to organise themselves with their own identities at the local, regional, continental, and global levels, while at the same time forming common democratic confederal structures at the respective levels.

In this context, autonomous, interfaith, and intercultural women's organisations play a strategic role. On the one hand, they provide a basis for women to unite in their struggle against patriarchal attitudes and violence, thereby making their efforts more effective. On the other hand, women's cooperation and their vital common concerns also unite the diverse cultural, religious, and social communities that are also part of women's social identity and existence. By becoming aware of their common historical heritage, which is based on the values and wisdom of matriarchal societies all over the world, women can also find creative solutions to many current social problems caused by patriarchal and colonial rule.

This gives the concept of internationalism a new dimension. It no longer embodies a mere gathering of workers from all countries or solidarity between different national parties and movements. Rather, internationalism becomes a mentality and expression of communal, solidarity-based life and a confederal union of democratic communes that organise and interact with each other as democratic nations at both regional and global levels, beyond nation-states. The socialist character of the communes and their confederations needs to be measured by the extent to which they contribute to realising a free communal life for women and men, democratic politics as well as collective, ecological economies.

4- Both the goal of democratic socialism and the path to achieving it require local, regional, and international organisational structures based on democratic principles, mutual solidarity, and continuous cooperation. The failure of the Comintern in particular shows that state-hierarchical organisational models based on strong centralism and bureaucracy are not suitable for understanding the specific conditions and requirements for revolutionary processes in different parts of the world in an equitable and complementary manner. Instead, international alliances of democratic forces and communities, as well as confederal, horizontal organisational models based on international coordination and collective responsibility, much more embody the spirit of internationalism. Such international organisational structures must likewise be designed to represent and strengthen the democratic will of local and regional communal organisations.

At all levels, autonomous, internationalist women's organising, women's participation in all fields of life and work, and the representation of women's collective will in decision-making processes and bodies are indispensable. Together with the model of co-chairing, these principles provide a solid foundation for an effective struggle against patriarchal mentalities and sexism in organisational and social structures. In this way, women can develop common positions at the international level, articulate their specific needs, and participate in determining the general agenda.

However, democratic functioning is not solely a question of organisational structure. Above all, it requires that all individuals and communities involved liberate themselves from internalised patriarchal, state-hierarchical patterns of thought and behaviour and live in accordance with socialist values. The "First Communal International", which Abdullah Öcalan has proposed in his Manifesto for Peace and a Democratic Society in 2025 is based on a holistic implementation of his democratic, ecological paradigm based on women's liberation. This includes anchoring a democratic culture based on mutual respect and appreciation in all our political, social, and personal relationships.

Weaving Networks of World Women's Democratic Confederalism

The concept of World Women's Democratic Confederalism expresses both the goal and the path to rethinking, reshaping, and living internationalist women's organising in the 21st century—locally, regionally, and globally. Women's internationalism can play an important role in connecting various currents and movements of democratic modernity, such as workers, landless, youth, ecological, democratic, and peace movements, as well as religious and cultural communities. In this process, common historical analyses of society, programs, principles, and structures can be developed to coordinate actions that shape politics and social life beyond the state. This also includes building self-defence awareness and structures. However, efforts must not be limited to defending against attacks by the system. Rather, it is important to collectively build democratic socialist models of life and society that respect the independent will of women and all social groups, without resorting to the tools and methods of the ruling class.

The experiences of women in revolutions and liberation struggles worldwide have taught us that socialism cannot be achieved without a programmatic, strategic approach to women's liberation. The methods of Jineolojî provide us with tools to learn from our history and our life stories, to analyse social and political developments, and to develop and access useful knowledge for building World Women's Democratic Confederalism. This includes the knowledge of wise women from history and the present, feminist theories and women's resistance, holistic philosophies of life such as Buen Vivir of the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala, as well as Abdullah Öcalan's ideology of women's liberation and socio-historical analyses. We have become aware that autonomous women's organisation based on the ideology of women's liberation can bring about far-reaching democratic transformation processes in both political culture and society. The joint commitment and awareness of women is crucial for establishing a democratic culture, solution-oriented methods, and a collective way of working that is geared towards the needs of women and society as a whole.

Social transformation begins with developing shared moral principles and criteria for freedom. In this regard, social discussions, education, and research within the framework of Jineolojî play an important role in raising awareness about the roots and manifestations of patriarchal violence and awakening the desire and will for change (including among men). By questioning prevailing dogmas, categories, and "truths," we begin to develop a new understanding of morality, beauty, and justice together. As a result, women of all ages are increasingly developing the courage to question patriarchal views and traditions in family and society, to articulate their will, and to embark on new paths in life. The experiences of the Women's Freedom Movement in Kurdistan show us that intellectual and practical developments are intertwined and reinforce each other. By becoming aware of the cultural and historical foundations of Democratic Confederalism, we can succeed in reviving and further developing existing democratic social traditions.

That is why the works of Jineolojî are involved with researching traces of mother goddess culture and solidarity-based, ecological forms of society in history and the present day. These include, for example, the tradition of common land in Europe and the culture of gift-giving, which still plays an important role in Middle Eastern societies. Giving without expecting anything in return and feeling joy in doing so is a tradition of solidarity that contradicts capitalist notions of property and consumption. Examples such as the women's justice councils in Rojava or approaches to transformative justice practised in various collectives in the US, India, and Indonesia illustrate that it is society, not the state, that regulates their lives.

This is also evident in the way life is still organised today in many clan and village communities around the world. Sharing joy, pain, and life's necessities, the communal care of children, the sick, and the poor in the neighbourhood, mutual aid, or the joint performance of domestic and agricultural work are understood as natural, communal tasks. This social culture, which values life and people, stands in contrast to state social services, retirement homes, and nursing homes, where people are to be incapacitated, confined, and made merely functional.

In Jineolojî camps and collective educational processes in Rojava, we have seen that the actual learning processes go hand in hand with the organisation of collective life, cultural exchange, artistic creativity, and finding a common language. The process of discussion and collective decision-making, where everyone sees themselves as responsible for implementing decisions and acts accordingly, is an important criterion for the culture of democratic socialism.

The "enormous political explosive power" of Abdullah Öcalan's redefinition of internationalism, which Ş. Nûdem (Uta Schneiderbanger) foresaw 20 years ago, is taking concrete shape more and more. Abdullah Öcalan's Call for Peace and a Democratic Society has opened up new paths for us to weave the threads of the women's revolution and internationalism in the 21st century into stronger strands for new creative and lasting networks, for the building of a communalist international and the organization of the democratic modernity on an international level.

About the Academy of Democratic Modernity

As the Academy of Democratic Modernity, we strive to communicate the ideas and richness of experience of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and its paradigm of democratic modernity. Our publications aim to initiate joint discussions with activists, academics and various anti-systemic and social movements in order to move forward in our search for radical alternatives to capitalist modernity and the realisation of a free life. Through our educational work, we want to create a new understanding of democratic politics, social enlightenment and a new political-moral consciousness. We address social issues such as: democratic autonomy, the intertwining of lines of resistance, sociology of freedom, women's liberation, youth autonomy, social ecology, communal economy and art & culture. Through the development of platforms and networks, we aim to contribute to the strengthening of an international exchange of experiences and to interweave existing struggles in the sense of democratic world confederalism. Overcoming capitalist modernity requires concrete local and global institutional alternatives. If we succeed in expanding democratic politics in everyday life - through alliances, councils, communes, cooperatives, academies - the huge political power of society will unfold and be used to solve social problems. In this sense, we see our activities as a contribution to the unfolding of democratic modernity and democratic socialism.

Let us work together to bring our visions and utopias to life. Another world is not only possible - given the world situation, it is sorely needed. Let's start building our future world together in the present, because waiting would be madness.

More information in English, Spanish, Italian, German and French can be found here:

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