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Obituary

Sarah Parker: socialist feminist and tireless fighter for Kurdistan

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It was with great sadness that Anti*Capitalist Resistance heard of the death of our comrade Sarah Parker, at the age of 67. For two years Sarah had been suffering from breast cancer. She will be remembered as a tireless fighter for socialist feminism, anti-racism and solidarity with the struggle of the Kurdish people for national self-determination.

At the time of her death, Sarah was a member of the ACR steering committee. In the late 1970s, Sarah joined the International Marxist Group; after the 1985 split, she was one of the comrades who founded the International Socialist Group, the main precursor of the ACR.

Sarah had been politicised, mainly around issues of women's oppression, during her period as a student at Newnham College, Cambridge. Sarah's parents had been members of the Communist Party in Hornsey, part of the London borough of Haringey and much of Sarah's activity was in this north London borough, which is a centre of Turkish and Kurdish activism. Until recently Sarah had lived in houses on the 'Ladder', a series of roads off Green Lanes in the heart of the Turkish and Kurdish community, an area with many Turkish/Kurdish food shops and restaurants.

Sarah was deeply involved in the work of the Broadwater Farm defence campaign, after 369 young people, mainly from the Black community, were arrested following the death of a policeman during the 1985 rioting caused by the shooting of a local Black woman, Cynthia Jarrett, by the police. She was also a regular part of local protests against incidents of police racism outside the notorious local police station in Tottenham.

Her commitment to anti-racism went beyond work in the borough. She was instrumental in setting up the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS) in 2000 when Blair's New Labour made clear their intention to make for refugees even more difficult than the Tories had, establishing an "asylum detention" complex, run by the likes of G4S and Serco under Home Office contracts. She served as CDAS treasurer and was a fixture at protests in defence of refugee rights.

Sarah was also involved in Women against Fundamentalism, set up in 1989 to work at the interface of feminism and anti-racism, in struggles against both religious fundamentalism and the excesses of neoliberalism in the wake of the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

In the 1990s Sarah's main focus shifted to the Kurdish struggle for self-determination, and Sarah became well known to Kurdish activists for her tireless work on this issue. [1]

Although she was diffident about her writing ability, Sarah contributed articles to a range of left magazines and websites, including [Socialist Resistance](#), [Left Unity](#), International Viewpoint and the [ACR](#). She was also the joint author of a long [Left Unity pamphlet](#) on the Kurdish Struggle and the rise of dictatorship in Turkey, which she wrote together with Phil Hearse. Among Sarah's articles was a [contribution](#) to debate inside the Fourth International about the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), and the role that the organisation and its supporters in north Syria, the YPG (Peoples Defence Units) played in the liberated zones, collectively known as Rojava. Sarah led an [online ACR discussion](#) about the Kurdish struggle.

Sarah was a voracious reader and an extremely talented linguist. She did Classics at Cambridge University, a difficult course that demands high grade A Levels in Latin and Greek. Because of her interest in the Kurdish struggle, she

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taught herself Turkish and some Kurdish. She was always learning new languages, as she put it, 'for fun.'

She was a good cook, capable of turning her hand to a number of international cuisines, and very fond of her own cooking.

During key events like the Kurdish turn towards [self-governing communities](#), which led to a brutal backlash by the Turkish state; the 2013 uprising sparked by the [struggle at Gezi Park](#) in Istanbul; the building of the broad left-wing, Kurdish-led party in Turkey, the [HDP \(Peoples Democratic Party\)](#); 2016 attempted military coup in Turkey; and the struggle for Rojava in northern Syria, Sarah's front room resembled a war room where she would sit up half the night, scouring the web, watching Kurdish TV programmes and reading books and documents. While exasperated by what she saw as indifference by most of the British left, Sarah made herself one of the left's most knowledgeable people on this issue.

She approached her illness with unflappable matter-of-factness. Just three weeks before her death she was telling friends that her cancer had spread to her liver and spine, but there was nothing to worry about, and that her oncologist had said that people often lived for some time with her condition. It is doubtful that she actually believed that. Her optimism was more for her friends than for herself.

Sarah had an MA in translation and could have had a profitable career as a translator; instead, she chose to devote herself to many years as her mother's carer, to her studies and above all her activism in support of the most progressive mass force in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean.

The struggle for [Rojava](#) in Syria and the self-governing communities of North Kurdistan embody a unique experiment in local self-government, but also a radical turn in the Kurdish/Turkish left, the promotion of women to be leaders at all levels of community and regional groups, but also crucially the mayors of cities and towns. Wherever a man was elected to a position, then a woman must also be selected to share the post with him. The armed fighters of the PKK and the YPG have built [women's brigades](#), which share the fighting at all levels. The integration of women's leadership with radical democracy was an objective that inspired Sarah, as it has inspired many socialists worldwide. Her friends and comrades will ensure that Sarah's struggle continues.

5 September 2022

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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[1] See tribute from Peace in Kurdistan: "[Peace in Kurdistan pays tribute to Sarah Parker](#)".