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In Memoriam

In Honour of Marijke

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Tribute delivered by Daniel Tanuro at the funeral of Belgian eco-socialist and feminist Marijke Colle, Thursday, 27 April 2023.

Honouring the memory of Marijke requires mobilizing many qualifiers. Marijke was an extremely intelligent person. She was a scientist attached to reason, rigor and integrity in the apprehension of reality: facts, facts, facts, because "A fact is worth more than a lord mayor" ...

Marijke was a biologist, in the deep, existential sense of the verb "to be". It was much more than a profession: a formation of thought. As Pips pointed out, Darwin was her hero. Like him, Marijke had curiosity, sympathy and empathy for all that lives.

The idea that humanity is part of nature while being distinct from other animals, the idea in other words that human history is intertwined with natural history while also obeying social laws, which are not "natural", was obvious for Marijke. For her, most of these questions had been resolved by her mentor, in his second great work, "The Descent of Man", unfortunately less well known than "The Origin of Species". Like Patrick Tort, Marijke saw civilization as a "reversive effect" of natural selection.

Biologists of Marijke's calibre are never cold fish. We think of Stephen Jay Gould, Rachel Carson, and many others. Marijke was a person of great control, of great balance. She did not speak lightly, and always in a measured tone. But outrage at exploitation, oppression, brutality and cowardice boiled within her, and surfaced in her speech.

"Stille water, diepe gronden" ["Still waters run deep"]: this Flemish saying – which has no real equivalent in French – sheds light quite well, I think, on the personality of our comrade. Marijke was a passionate person, with a calm but intense passion. When she spoke, one felt a great determination, a moral strength anchored on very solid foundations where personal considerations were never in the foreground.

Marijke was radical in Marx's sense: to solve a problem, we must identify its root rationally, and act accordingly, revolutionarily. She mastered the categories of historical materialism – mode of production, relations of production, classes and social strata, capital, social overproduction, value, surplus value and so on – but it was the opposite of dogmatics. A free spirit, Marijke was not afraid to leave the beaten track when reality dictated it.

In addition to the trade union struggle, in which she participated as a teacher, Marijke's contribution was particularly important on two levels: feminism and eco-socialism. In both cases, it was a question of going beyond the limits, indeed the blinkers, of a certain Marxist tradition, patriarchal and productivist.

Along with other activists in the Women's Commission of the Belgian section [of the Fourth International], Marijke played a key role in the fight for the decriminalization of abortion. If the women of the Christian Workers' Movement (MOC) were convinced to rally to the Lallemand/Herman-Michielsens bill, it is to these comrades that we owe it. It was a huge victory for emancipation in our country. A few years later, Marijke took over and played a leading role in the vast united campaign "Women against the crisis".

At the same time, Marijke was one of the first in the Fourth International, and the first in the Belgian section, to take full measure of the terrible barbaric threats arising from the vertiginous fall of biodiversity, the irreversible disruption of the climate, the chemical and radioactive poisoning of the planet. She devoted a regular column to it in our

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newspapers, *La Gauche* and *Rood*. From the beginning of the 1980s, in the context of a training day, she challenged the members of the Belgian section by stressing the need to go beyond the essential structural changes, in particular by eating substantially less meat.

For fifteen years, Marijke had been working on eco-feminism, a privileged concept to converge the two great struggles of her activist life. While distancing herself from the essentialist conceptions of some women authors for whom women are “by nature” more ecologist than men, she did not hide her admiration for the commitment of a Vandana Shiva. She was not afraid to point out that the domination of women and the domination of nature have more than similarities in form: they are two sides of the same coin.

An excellent teacher, Marijke made it a point of honour to express the most complicated things in simple terms. Her teaching skills, sincerity, humanity and dedication earned her the esteem and recognition of many. This is particularly the case for women activists from the global south who had the chance to follow her training at the Amsterdam Institute, of which Marijke was co-director for four years.

Marijke was modest. She hated the show-offs, the upstarts, the navel-gazers of all kinds. And could not stand the beautiful talkers – usually male and very verbose – who believe that using or inventing many complicated words gives them the quality of “philosophers”.

Militant life is made up of many defeats, some successes and a lot of personal disillusionment, with its share of pettiness and jealousy. Marijke sometimes suffered, but this did not call into question her loyalty to revolutionary, feminist, internationalist and eco-socialist Marxism. In this age of unbridled narcissism, this deserves immense respect that we owe to her steadfast, upright nature and fierce will to struggle.

In the last years of the last century, the example of Marijke encouraged me to use my scientific training to help our political current to consider the centrality of the global ecological crisis. It is an understatement to say that I am grateful to her.

On behalf of the Belgian section of the Fourth International, I pay tribute to our comrade Marijke, formerly known by her pseudonym of Lida.

On my own behalf, I salute a very dear friend, to whom I owe a great deal.

Companera Marijke presente!

PS:

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