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Marijke Colle, a lifetime of curiosity and activity

Sunday 30 April 2023, by [DE JONG Alex](#) (Date first published: 17 April 2023).

On Sunday 16 April came the sad news that our comrade Marijke Colle passed away at the age of seventy-five. A staunch feminist-socialist, Marijke devoted herself to various movements for many years and remained politically active until the end. Her dedication, intellect and zeal made her a role model for many others.

Marijke was born in 1947 into a conservative Flemish family. Like so many of her contemporaries, she politicised in the 1968 wave. Marijke played a leading role in that movement. She became a member of Dolle Mina in the 1970s and active in the socialist-feminist movement. As a member of the Belgian sister organisation of Grenzeloos (then Ligue Révolutionnaire des Travailleurs - Revolutionary Workers' League, now Gauche Anticapitaliste - Anticapitalists), Marijke played an important role in the fight for abortion rights in Belgium.

In that struggle, Marijke gained valuable experience and knowledge that she would later pass on to new generations and apply in other movements. Marijke knew that socialists could play a driving role by combining radical demands with broad mobilisations. For Marijke, being radical meant not standing aloof, but being active where you can convince people and change something. For instance, she was a militant member of the education union for many years.

In an obituary, SAP - Anticapitalists writes that Marijke's life was characterised by three dimensions; revolutionary Marxism, feminism and ecology. Marijke studied biology and worked as a biology teacher for many years. Ecology and climate change were close to her heart. In the Fourth International, she again played a pioneering role, this time putting ecology forward as a central issue for socialists more than 30 years ago. Climate change, Marijke recognised early on, is a matter of class struggle: if the left does not put forward its own answers, it will be working people worldwide who will literally and figuratively bear the cost of this crisis.

For her, the way capitalism destroys the climate and the eco-system also showed the need to look at nature in a different way, to see it not just as a collection of raw materials for human use, but to recognise its intrinsic value and beauty. In this respect, Marijke was certainly critical of classical Marxism. Marijke knew how women face combined, often hidden forms of oppression and how even within the left there is a risk of reproducing sexist patterns. In response, Marijke always championed women's right to organise among themselves.

Marijke was an internationalist at heart. She was active in Belgium, Britain, France and the Netherlands, always aware of the international implications of processes such as climate change and the need for international solidarity. During a visit to the Philippines, where she saw how activists there were championing ecologically responsible agriculture as a means of both conservation and livelihood for the population, Marijke was completely in her element. One of the last actions she was able to participate in was a solidarity action with the people of Ukraine.

From 2009 to 2013, Marijke lived in the Netherlands and was co-director of IIRE Amsterdam, the training institute of the Fourth International. She had a talent for teaching, she could explain complex issues in a clear way and enthuse people. Marijke had strong convictions and did not hide differences of opinion. At the same time, she remained curious about new ideas and was always willing to engage in discussion. Through her trainings, articles and through informal discussions, Marijke influenced many activists who will remember her with gratitude.

Marijke realised the scope of current social and ecological crises and how urgent radical change is. At the same time, she drew hope from movements like those of small farmers in the Global South and the radicalism of young climate activists. Marijke's attitude to life was a fine example of what Gramsci called 'pessimism of intellect, optimism of will'. She was also very down-to-earth and would find quoting someone like Gramsci especially rather pretentious.

Marijke was a born rebel with a passion for politics who also managed to make time for the occasional pint. It is a privilege to have learnt from and known her. Our thoughts are with her family, comrades and friends, especially her partner Pips.

Alex de Jong

P.S.

- Grenzeloos. 17.04.2023 :
<https://www.grenzeloos.org/content/marijke-colle-een-leven-lang-nieuwsgierig-en-actief>
- Translation DeepL.