

Interview with the Kurdistan Anarchists Forum (KAF) about the situation in Iraq/Kurdistan

A Las Barricadas

3rd September 2014

ALB: How are you now ?

We are fine but like many of you extremely concerned about the current situation in Iraq in general and the Iraqi part of Kurdistan in particular. We are very active in the social media with respect to writing, making comments and discussing the current crisis that exists with different people and groups.

Are you afraid that the ISIS attack will defeat the Peshmerga?

Actually, the attack by ISIS is not just an attack on the Regional Kurdistan Government (KRG) forces or military (recognised as Peshmerga), it is attack on everybody. As you know ISIS is the darkest of forces and is far more brutal than any of the other terrorist groups. They do not distinguish between an armed people and the ordinary people. Wherever ISIS has entered, it has given the residents a very hard time by controlling them, subduing them by implementing Sharia Law. We are sure you have heard what happened already to the Yazidis, who are a peaceful people and did not fight with them at all. ISIS is no less brutal to Christians and Shias than the Yazidis, because they believe these people, all, are devils or evil.

We are more concerned about the actual war that the people in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdish are facing now, more than a defeat of the Peshmerga at the hands of ISIS. The KRG forces (Peshmerga) are the corrupt forces of the current political parties who are in power, mainly the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), whose leader is Massoud Barzany who is the president of Iraqi Kurdistan as well, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), still led by Jalal Talabany, the former Iraqi president. There are also other forces from Islamic organisations and other small political parties. However, we know that these forces (Peshmerga) are a tool in the hands of the political parties and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), but as you know we have nothing in common with them and always consider them to be a suppressing force. However, while Iraq and Kurdistan at the moment face the darkest forces in their current history, we should be worried about the Peshmerga being defeated.

There is another important point that we would like to bring to your attention. The Peshmerga at first were not just defeated: they actually fled without shooting a single bullet. If it were not

because of the People's Defence Units (PDU) and Women's Defence Units (WDU) (the Syrian Kurdish forces) and later PKK, ISIS could easily have invaded the capital of Kurdistan, Irbil. If they had occupied Irbil then the rest of the Kurdistan towns would fall into their hands with no resistance or very little resistance.

Are your people working in self-defence against ISIS?

As we, KAF, previously stated, we are only a Virtual Forum, not a physical organization in that we have no people from the top to the bottom. The majority of us who write in our Forum (Seko) live abroad; we therefore can do nothing physically for the self-defence of Kurdistan. If you mean people in Kurdistan who agree with our ideas or are close to KAF, of course, they try to organize themselves to fight back. However, because there is no anarchist movement in Kurdistan, we are sorry to say that yes, there are no self-defence groups or movements as we see in Turkey and (Rojava) Syrian Kurdistan. We do believe the only force or power can defeat ISIS is independent self-defence from the mass of the people. Unfortunately this force or movement at the moment does not exist.

What do you think of the US bombings?

Before the US decided to bombard and hit the ISIS bases, there were a lot of rumours and news that ISIS was created by the US, UK and Israel. The more reliable evidence that we can refer to was from Edward Snowden about this. Now when they (UK and US) decide to attack ISIS and sell weapons to the KRG, it is to undermine Edward Snowden's information and the rumours that spread widely.

We are against intervention from the US and Western countries and also selling weapons to the KRG. We know this is big business for them, that can make a lot of profits through this trade. We also do not want Kurdistan to become a battlefield for all the Jihadist groups in the world against the US, Western countries and the Kurdish, in which so many innocent people would be killed and many places would be destroyed. In addition, the war situation creates more haters between Kurds and Arabs, between Kurds and Sunnis. In the meantime it caused the emergence of many racist and fascist groups.

The only winners in the wars are the big companies who sell weapons and war equipment, and the losers – as always – are the poor people.

Do you work with PYD/PKK/PÇDK?

No we do not. Because we reject any support or co-operation with any hierarchal, political and authoritarian groups and organizations. We only line up ourselves and are interested in any resistance from the mass of people and the social movements wherever they are in this world and we are ready to support them by whatever means we can.

As for your answers, in Iraq there is now a self-defence group called the Sinjar Protection Units (YPS). I think this is a creation of the YPG. Also the PÇDK is creating its own militia. I imagine that some rank-and-file peshmerga might now be looking at self-defence militias with sympathy. Do you think it is possible to have over the next few months an autonomous canton in Iraq, similar to those in Rojava? (I mean autonomous with respect to the KRG, the US and everything else.)

We unfortunately do not think something like what you mentioned can happen easily and quickly because:

Firstly, the nature of the parliamentary system and the role of centralism in Iraq like elsewhere does not allow it. Secondly, thirteen years of sanctions by western countries and the US against Iraq, including Kurdistan, as well as the invasion and occupation, then the imposition of a free-

market policy and globalization on Iraq, forcing it to be dependent on conditions that have been laid down by the big powers in Europe and the financial institutions (the IMF, WB, ECB). Thirdly, there are internal reasons as well. The Kurdistan Regional Government, (KRG) has dominated every aspect of people's life in Kurdistan for the last 22 years. They have worked on changing the mentality of the citizens to be corrupt, to be materialistic, to lose their own self-confidence and independence, to be dependent on them mentally and financially. The KRG has created such an atmosphere in Kurdistan that the majority of the people just think about how to get rich and compete with one another in becoming richer and in getting to better positions. In a very rich country like Kurdistan, its people are dependent on everything imported from abroad, there is no independent economy as the policies of the parties in power have destroyed the independent economy of Kurdistan.

We believe that what happened in Syrian Kurdistan in terms of setting up the military Units and also self-rule in its three cantons, that the PKK and PYD are behind them and the DSAs under their influences. This means that if something like that happened in Sinjar, neither the KRG nor the Iraqi central government and the countries in the region and US would allow this pair of forces (the PKK and PYD) to stay in Sinjar for a long time, supporting people there to announce their own self-rule.

We recognize that setting up people's defence units as a people's army and also democratic self-administration (DSA) on the basis of people's cooperatives, communes and emerging federalism, needs a very long social process of mass struggle, independently, to involve people in all social and economic questions, which becomes something very urgent and necessary. These are the grounds of setting up a true people's defence unit and the direct-democratic administration, otherwise the units will be a militia like any other militia in the world and the so called DSA will be a real dictatorial government.

It is a fact that there was a big conspiracy in withdrawing the KRG forces (Peshmerga) and this created a gap or gave an opportunity for mass resistance to emerge and set up Protection Units among Yazidis themselves, who had been the victims of genocide and displacement. However, there is another important point perhaps you are not aware of which is among the Yazidis themselves there are elites, especially the religion's Prince and the powerful rich people who are always supportive of the KRG's policies, having an impact on many people in the Yazidi community by using their religious influences. This can be a big threat and divide the Yazidi community.

In short, neither the self-consciousness of people under the KRG nor the economic and the social grounds are likely – at least at present – to allow what we see in Syrian Kurdistan happening in Sinjar. In addition when comes to that, there is the possibility for both – the KRG and the Iraqi central government – to unite against the people's resistance in Sinjar using any means in suppressing and oppressing them. We also believe the regional, western countries and US who for almost two decades have been investing politically and economically there (Iraqi Kurdistan) and making very huge profits, are not just sitting and watching the situation. They are therefore intervening, first by using their network of spies, logistical support, then providing anything else to the KRG and Iraqi central government that is needed to protect their interests. It is worth reminding you that at the same time both Iran and Turkey's governments have been continuously attempting to eliminate the PKK's forces and are using this as an excuse to penetrate the Kurdistan border with their military forces and bombard the region, killing so many innocent people.

In addition to what we said, we must admit that there is no anarchist social movement there (Iraqi Kurdistan) at all. What we have there is more the idea and thought of anarchism.

In fact the leftist and communist parties are trying to create their own Units under the name of “people’s guards” or “Units of the People’s resistance” but they are not in a enough strong position to do so; even if they do manage to do it in the future, it won’t be anything different from the hierarchal units or at best they will be militias of the sort we have so many of (militias and state militias) in Kurdistan. Their real intention is to make political capital out of this and, like any other political group or military Unit, try to get wages and salary from the bourgeois government.

Some Kurdish women from the PKK came to Barcelona last month. One of them recognized herself as an anarchist. She was from Germany and she wanted to learn more about anarchist history here in Spain. Do you think there are anarchists in the ranks of PKK? Do you have contacts with them? Would it be possible to have a left libertarian current inside this hierarchical movement?

Yes. Inside the PKK and PYD there are men and women with anarchist ideas and thought. Some of these people have reached that through their own struggles and experiences; the others have become anarchist and libertarian under the influence of Abdullah Öcalan. They have realized that anarchism is the most radical answer to the capitalist system. We believe that those who have embraced the anarchist idea under the influence of Öcalan may not be as solid as the people who reached the same ideas through their own struggles and experiences. Obviously the reason for that is while Öcalan is still at the top of a hierarchal organization like the PKK, and has every power, if for some reason he orders the people inside the PKK or PYD to change their direction, we are sure many of them are happy to do it. If that happens there is a possibility for this group to change its principles and direction. We think differently about those especially guerilla women who have become anarchist through their own experiences as they are members of the groups and committees in the villages and towns in society; we believe they are more stable and solid. We have seen a few interviews that they have given and also seen a few films that show how they live together and how do they manage their work and daily life together, like living in communes. All these give us more hope, yet again because we do not live with them, therefore we do not know how much of this is true. We must also say that among their sister parties in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan, we unfortunately do not see these positive changes and directions. These people almost look like the PKK of the early 1990s; they are still nationalist and most of their leaders are very authoritarian. We think they do not embrace the current ideas and thought of Öcalan, like economic cooperatives, communes in the towns and villages, people’s self-rule, direct democracy, the system of federalism and free confederation. We believe the parties’ policies in Iranian/Iraqi Kurdistan are very much in contradiction with the current policies the PKK and PYD: they are still insisting on political changes rather than social changes, they are still competing with the other bourgeois parties in gaining money, power and position.

The experiences of many of us have proved or at least shown that it is very, very hard for a libertarian/anarchist idea and direction to grow and develop inside a hierarchal organization. Not only this, it is impossible for such ideas and directions to remain or stay and continue in an ideological nationalist organization. We can always separate or distinguish between the social movement and the leftist political movement whatever form they have because the leftists and politicians are always authoritarian and corrupt. We can see in reality the leftists are always trying to tame and control struggles and the movement of the mass people and use them to

achieve their own political aims, making political capital out of it. We are the witness of all the attempts that have been made by leftists during the uprising which took place in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 and up to present, how they have tried to change the direction of the mass movements, deceiving them, disappointing them, compromising with the State and trying to plant the seeds of naivety among people to believe in political parties, centralism, “the workers state”, “communist state” and “socialist state”. This is all the propaganda that they have produced since then.

Unfortunately, so far we have been unable to make a direct link or connection with the anarchist people in the PKK and PYD. We have tried before to do so but we were not successful. However, we are hoping to make that connection in the near future.

And the last question: what do you think about Democratic Confederalism? Is it true that the PKK is in favour of this or is it propaganda held by the Western countries? (If they pass as, for example, similar to the Zapatistas, they might be seen as “cool” in the leftist milieu.)

Actually, answering this question is difficult firstly because the PKK controls a region and is completely different from what the Zapatistas in their country controlled, and also because the PKK is a hierarchal force as a party and as a military force. We cannot be sure of the details of their daily life and their actions as we do not have evidence to prove whether it is true or false. The only things that we can talk about are Democratic Self-Administration (DSA) of Syrian Kurdistan, and Tev-Dem, which one of our comrades visited a while ago for a couple of weeks. Certainly there is no comparison between there and the KRG in Iraqi Kurdistan. At the moment there is power sharing between whole political parties within DSA so there is a good balance. The PYD as a main party in there took advantage of being in a very strong position, because on one side the KRG cannot use its proxy party (Alparty) to control DSA and the situation; on the other side the Islamist organization cannot have any influence in Syrian Kurdistan. However, while the PYD is the main party and in the next DSA election no doubt will win the majority of votes there, we do not know if the PYD will control the DSA or simply use another method to balance the power sharing. This worries us obviously and we will have to wait and see. What we can say is that the PYD is also a hierarchal party with authoritarian people leading it, and because of this there is a possibility of change either ways. We certainly cannot compare DSA with the KRG, as the KRG is an excellent protector of free-market capitalism. The experiments of DSA and Tev-Dem are very attractive and have produced more hope by transferring the position of women in the religious and patriarchal society of the Middle East, improving and developing it. They have created a feeling of liberation and the tendency for self-liberation among women. The dignity, personality, self-confidence and freedom of women have all returned. All this cannot be achieved by every force or party. This has created an atmosphere for the anarchist movement especially while women already have a major role in the communes and the rest of the local groups and committees. They can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with men, leading them into the future to a social revolution. In the meantime we are hoping this experiment is setting a good example for the women in Iraqi Kurdistan – who are currently under the strong influence of the capitalist free market, consumer culture and political parties including the religious parties – for them to leave this stage and get involved in a social revolution.

The women in Syrian Kurdistan do not just play a big role in the areas/fields we mentioned above: in fact by setting up the Women’s Defence Units (WDU) the position of women in Middle Eastern society, as weak creatures having only certain duties which are inside the house, has changed. It has raised the question that they cannot be dominated by men, clans and religions.

They can change society and it has proved again that any movement in society which does not include them cannot get anywhere. Women have reaffirmed that the desire and feeling of liberating themselves from slavery or from being a second-class citizen in a patriarchal society only comes from their own efforts and struggles. That being said, a long time ago there was no force who could liberate a slave unless that slave had the self-consciousness of liberation and this has become a strong demand and desire.

Finally we thank you very much and recognize your concerns about other anarchists in different parts of the world. In this interview you have given us a good opportunity to talk briefly about the Iraqi, Kurdish and Middle East societies. This opportunity perhaps opens a small window to English speakers and those anarchists who can speak English to see the situation that explained above from our view. We think not many anarchists in the world are aware or know a lot about the situation in this part of the world. This may encourage them to make the effort to get to know a bit about the Middle East and the anarchist movement there. We have noted that the self-centrist views of European comrades in general has been one of the diseases of the anarchist movement since the Second World War because we think many of the anarchists comrades, who normally focus on Europe, the US and Latin America, do not have much interest in the same movement in elsewhere.

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Retrieved on 22nd March 2021 from tahriricn.wordpress.com
This interview was carried out by www.alasbarricadas.org on 3rd September 2014. The English translation has been edited for readability by Anarkismo.net.

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