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About the Syrian Revolution

Elia Ayoub

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The Syrian revolution started off as a bottom-up, working class uprising from the peripheries organised through local co-ordination committees. They set up local councils throughout the liberated areas that coordinated to provide services in the absence of a state.

They actually experienced life without the state, and they thrived. They were the living proof that not only can it be done, but that it can be fun and meaningful. Libraries, clinics, hospitals, schools, soup kitchens and more — all organised by the people who belonged to their communities.

There's nothing romantic about all of this. There were challenges, ups and downs, loads of failures, but also an extraordinary amount of successes. The anarchist Omar Aziz pointed out, correctly, that Syrians lasted more than the Paris commune.

The first thing ppl did once the regime collapsed was liberate the prisons. Carcerality was widely understood as a core component of the regime's apparatus. He couldn't just kill everyone every day on the streets. He had to forcibly disappear and kill 100,000s to break communities. And he failed.

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As an anarchist I believe that any effort, however flawed, that contributes to a freer world ought to be supported, even if critically. This is why I believe that the Left, broadly speaking, almost everywhere, failed Syrians.

In the 13 years since 2011, as the prisons continued to be filled and turned into the living hells we saw in Saydnaya, the global anti-carceral movement largely ignored Syria. The Western pro-Palestine movement attacked and condemned Syrians and Syrian-Palestinians for revolting against Assad.

The absolute minimum right now is for everyone who failed to listen when the screams were at their loudest – when Aleppo fell, when Homs was decimated, when Daraya was emptied, when Yarmouk was starved, when Daraa's kids were tortured, when Ghouta was gassed – to be humble and reflect.

There is now a lot of interest in making sure that what comes after Assad is chaotic. The Gulf does not want democracy in the Arab world. Israel and the USA do not want democracy in the Arab world. Turkey, Russia, Iran neither. The Egyptian military dictatorship? Same.

That's not even including problems from within. The Assad regime annihilated the organised Left over decades, decimated the unions. They sectarianized the population to divide it. The challenges ahead are herculean, but it doesn't mean that they can't be overcome.

Again, these are the people who created the local councils and local coordination committees while Assad and Iran and Russia and Hezbollah were besieging, bombing, gassing, torturing and disappearing them. They held elections in hundreds of villages and towns.

Pity and charity are not what's needed here. Pointless 'I hope it doesn't get worse' comments are useless at best and at worst insulting to those who suffered under Assad. Worse than a toddler born of rape in Saydnaya prison? Bodies crushed to be disposed of in mass graves? You monsters.

Samir Kassir understood this long ago. Freedom in Syria is tied to freedom in Palestine is tied to freedom in Lebanon (etc etc). He was just a journalist and a historian and yet so dangerous that he was the *first* to be assassinated by Assad in Lebanon after the prime minister Hariri was killed.

Assad could have killed other politicians with Hezbollah's help, as he did to Hariri, but no he went for the journalist. Who was the 2nd person killed after Kassir? George Hawi, the ex leader of the Lebanese Communist Party. They were creating a new movement together.

As in Syria, any real alternative to the status quo was assassinated or disappeared in Lebanon. And in both Syria and Lebanon any Palestinian who dared link Palestinian freedom to the freedom of Lebanese and Syrians was pursued with the full savagery of the state. Kassir was all 3 identities.

But what the Assadists did in Lebanon was always a fraction of what they did in Syria. In Lebanon we also knew their Shabbiha well. I was a kid but I remember Assad's thugs – and that was nothing compared to what they did in Syria.

There are a lot of lessons to learn from what Syrians have gone through. It's a ridiculously rich and messy and complicated experience, and anyone anywhere can learn from it. Dictators can be toppled. States can be overcome. Imperialism can be defeated.