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The Arab rebellion and the imperialist war on Libya from a Kurdish perspective

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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The following is an interview with Nejat Firat Zeyneloglu, a Kurdish libertarian based in Turkey. In this interview, held on March 21st, he deals with the impact of the Arab rebellion for the Kurdish people, about the Kurdish protests in Southern Kurdistan, and draw relevant parallels to the situation of the Libyan rebels today and that of the Kurdish rebels after the First Gulf War.

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1. How were the Newroz celebrations this year (ie. the Kurdish new year)? With all the Arab revolts going on it is certainly an interesting time...

This year the Newroz celebrations were carried out in an absolutely enthusiastic atmosphere; millions of people participated in the celebrations all around Kurdistan and abroad. For decades, Newroz has not only been a national celebration, but has also been a demonstration which represents the tough and longstanding struggle for the liberation of the Kurds. As a matter of fact, we have fought for having the right to celebrate it for over a decade. Nevertheless, this year, what gave real motivation to the millions of Kurds who celebrated Newroz was the splendid revolt wave in the Middle East and Northern Africa. The Kurdish people have already welcomed this movement warmly, in sympathy with other people that are oppressed by brutal regimes. I think that this revolt wave has become a very important turning point in the consciousness of

people in the region: dictatorships or brutal regimes seemed like as if they were almost eternal or immortal, but if the people rise up to bring down these regimes, neither dictatorships nor hypocritical parliamentary systems could survive; the revolution is possible and also real. We all should draw lessons from this great experience.

2. What's the position of the Kurdish liberation movement in relation to these protests? Do you think the demands of the Arab masses create room for a common struggle?

It is clear that the Kurdish liberation movement is very glad of the Arab resistance. Kurds have been struggling for liberation for a long while, therefore, it can only be expected that they sympathize with these revolts. In its statement about the Arab revolt, the KCK (ie., *Koma Civakên Kurdistan* -Union of Communities in Kurdistan) saluted the rebels and called for the destruction of all dictatorships and brutal systems in the Middle East. I believe that the artificial hostilities between people or communities which have been systematically created by the ruling classes, states and imperialist powers, will dilute from now on. Thanks to the struggle of liberation, all people of the region may figure out that they are able to build a future together, through mutual aid. Let us hope so...

3. What has been the Kurdish population's role in Iraq during this wave of rebellion? We heard there have been important protests in Southern Kurdistan...

Really powerful demonstrations have been staged in Southern Kurdistan, or officially Iraqi Kurdistan. The demonstrations began when a poor former soldier tried to burn himself – exactly like in Tunisia – to protest against the corruption of the local government, poverty and the oppression in the region. On the same day, in Sulaymaniyah, thousands of people poured into streets to protest. This was a great revolt wave indeed. The regional government reacted violently to the protests: the police killed two protestors and injured fifty.

After that, of course, demonstrations were not over, on the contrary, they became stronger and spread out all over the region. I think it is clear that the resistance was inspired by the Arab revolt. The masses have been resisting the current situation where you have, on the one hand, an exploiter class which relies on the protection of local tribes and the regional government, and on the other hand, poor people living under a brutal system. The government makes promises to the people now, but I believe that the people cannot be deceived any longer.

4. The current situation in Libya has many parallels with the situation in Kurdish Iraq after the 1991 war, when the US declared the area a no-fly zone. Some elements of the left draw a mechanical conclusion that because the imperialist nations flex their muscles in crisis like this, on dictators such as Hussein or Gaddafi, then the right position is to side with those dictators against imperialism. Yet the liberals, tend to think that because those dictators are awful and the ground for rebellion against them is legitimate, this means we have to side with the imperialists against the dictators. Keeping in mind the Kurdish experience of the '90s and the complex position it has fighting both sworn enemies of imperialism such as Syria and Iran, while at the same time fighting a close ally of the US such as Turkey, while, on top of that, having a tough struggle in Iraq where a "Kurdish nationalist" government collaborates openly in crushing the resistance; what is your view of recent events in Libya?

As you said, there are similarities between the two situations, both in Kurdistan and Libya. And many leftists, just the way they are often mistaken with the Kurdish question, they are generally mistaken on the Libyan question. First, it is wrong to support any dictator or dictatorships, and worse, to consider that they could be progressive or honestly anti-imperialist. In

fact, all of these dictators oppress their people with the aid of some imperialist power. Secondly, it's also wrong to hope to get help from imperialists in any liberation struggle.

Defending dictatorships or defending the imperialist intervention against dictators, are basically the same thing; it means to reject or to ignore the will of the masses of the people who fight for their liberty by themselves. I'd like to point out that there is on both arguments, distrust of the people, the masses, and their struggle. For the imperialist countries, naturally, the whole issue is to provide a so-called "stability", because their interests depend on the "stability". So, generally, as long as their benefits are protected, they do not care who the dominant power is; fascists, social democrats, conservatives, greens and so on. Remember that as far as a month ago, Sarkozy, Berlusconi, Erdogan and others were best pals with Gaddafi. Because all of them have investments in Libya, and as you know, investment is more important than people's life for capitalism.

The imperialist countries are more worried about the Libyan people rather than Gaddafi. Therefore, the aim of this war is to establish and to guarantee a new structure in Libya that is for the benefit of the imperialist countries. I think that we must support the struggle of the Libyan people that is based on their own will. We must support all kind of practice of direct democracy and self-management against any kind of oppression or authority. We have to acknowledge that the Libyan people have the right to self-determination, and we have to side with people, not Gaddafi or the imperialists.

While the Kurdish resistance was fighting for liberation, the Turkish nationalist left criticized the liberation movement because they considered that Kurds have to accept the status quo and not to disrupt the international balance. But the freedom is a demand which cannot be postponed. We must defend the freedom and the self-management against both dictators and imperialists.

5. We hear about the Christians, the Shia, the Sunnis, the Allawis, among many others, having tensions as groups in the Middle East. The Kurdish liberation movement developed the project of Democratic Confederalism for the Middle East to find a peaceful coexistence of this complex mosaic of people, where communities from the bottom up federate according to affinities and common interests, and not based on colonial borders. Do you think this project is more relevant now with the region in revolt?

I take note of the project of democratic confederalism which was put forward by the Kurdish liberation movement and by Ocalan himself. In spite of several shortcomings, it is a project which is based on self-management, anti-capitalism and environmentalism and I think it is worth to be discussed. The liberation movement has just decided to put into practice this project in the areas where they are strong. As far as I am concerned, this experience must be observed and discussed.