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A New Form of International Solidarity

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Thoughts about democratic autonomy vs. nation state, by Duran Kalkan, member of the executive council of KCK in an interview with Kurdistan Report. and was translated and published in English by the Internationalist Commune of Rojava.

How can we understand democratic autonomy or democratic confederalism? Is it a system that is regionally specific and therefore only able to address the Kurdish population?

I can explain the democratic autonomy by giving a historical overview, as follows: the earlier concept of non-state society later became known as civil society, and stood for democratic achievements. Certain sections of society have won certain economic and democratic rights by a form of self-organizing. Some time ago the unions were very strong, for example in Western Europe. Within their systems they succeeded to ensure a certain standard of living for their members.

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Democratic autonomy actually means to strengthen structures of this kind and expand them in various other areas. This means to transform democratic achievements into a non-state democratic society organization. The system (in Western Europe) was based more on class struggle. The workers, with their unions and parties, are trying to gain and consolidate their rights through strikes and wage agreements. democratic autonomy means that this extended to all segments of society. Not only the workers and their union organizations, but the youth, the women, all sectors of society can organize themselves in a similar way, plan their own democratic and economic lives and implement this in their daily lives. We can do this without smashing the state, but also without giving up our rights to the state. In this way it is a new agreement with the state, a new social contract is created. Democratic autonomy or democratic confederalism has such an agreement as its aim. In this sense, democratic autonomy is not a system that is intended solely for the Kurds. All the oppressed and exploited sectors of society can use this system under the given conditions in their regions of the world to achieve their own cultural, political and economic rights. On this basis, one can also resolve the issue of gender and the problems of the labor force. The self-determination of the youth can also be made possible. The same also applies to the ecological question. Finally, if people from different parts of society organize themselves, they can solve their own issues better. At the same time a local self-organization and self-management will be revealed.

But now the government has established an extreme centralism through the formation of the nation state together with a move towards fascism. It wants to determine everything. However, the advancement of organizing along the lines of democratic autonomy could form the basis of the people being able to rule themselves. Like this for example, a village, a town, a district or a city could manage themselves. The formula is: "State vs democracy" with the aim of reducing the state and expanding the democratic society.

This is initially a model for the solution of the Kurdish question. National issues can be resolved in this way. Even religious issues can be solved this way. This is particularly true when different religious and ethnic groups live together. More importantly perhaps, economic issues can also be solved in this way. Oppression and exploitation can be fought. Because if a centralist and exploitation-based economy were to be replaced by an economy that is geared to the needs of the people at the grass roots, solutions for existing issues could be created on the basis of this model. That is the goal of the democratic confederalism. For sections of society who suffer from the problem of a lack of democracy, this system is a perspective, and this is also the case, as I said, for the liberation of women.

Therefore, in my view, this system presents a concept which is a solution for the capitalist metropolis in the West and for the less capitalized regions of the East. If we look at Europe, there are already the beginnings of such an organization. I have already spoken of the unionization of workers. In some villages, the residents have organized autonomously. There is such a form of organization in the tradition of the Paris Commune. Democratic autonomy is an organization directed against the aims of the hegemony of capitalist modernity and its attempt to take hold of society. Economic, health, education, culture and other areas are organized in this system itself. So capitalist exploitation can be surrounded and be limited. This also allows the state system which is behind capitalist exploitation to be limited, and the democratic society organization to be strengthened. The Paris Commune and the socialist-democratic revolutions must be considered as an inheritance. Starting from this base, the organization has to be transferred into every part of society, so that a democratic autonomy of the society is created. That is possible. Such a struggle is able to involve large parts of society. It is a struggle that tries to isolate the ruling system – and it is capable of doing so.

This concept has a different approach to that of the October Revolution, which abolished the ruling government and built a new one in its place which could supposedly solve all the problems of society. Why?

Firstly, this approach hasn't worked out anyway. Replacing the old state with a new one is not a solution. The state itself is a means of exploitation. With it one cannot bring democracy, it does not create freedom or equality. At the end it turns into oppression and exploitation. The state remains the state, no matter in whose hand it is. In the end it will lead us back to the same point. That is why this paradigm is no solution. Secondly, it is not possible to implement such an idea under the present circumstances anyway – even if it was wanted. It is simply unrealistic to believe that the ruling state system could be smashed so that democracy, socialism could be built up. But let's say that the revolution would be successful – still this approach will not lead to a sustainable solution. Real-socialism has demonstrated this.

That means the establishment of democratic confederalism or democratic autonomy, under the conditions in which we live, for everybody, the women, the youth, the workers, is the implementation of a democratic and socialist revolution. Not to create a new state, but to form a democratic society; not to smash the current state, but to provide against it an organized democratic society that confines the state – that is the goal. Thus people create what we call the formula of “State vs democracy”. Thus, in the democratic confederalism the competences which have been only connected to the state, are individually snatched and carried into society. And society self-exercises these competences in its democratic organization. This is how we understand democratic confederalism. And this can be done anywhere in this manner. So, this is not a concept that is limited to a geographical area. We see it as a way to solve all social questions. So this is not a model that is intended solely for the solution of ethnic or religious problems. All issues of freedom and democracy can be solved with this system. If every social

of democratic autonomy developed, where democratic society organizations show up against the state, between all these organizations anywhere in the world relationships of solidarity can be established. Thus, international solidarity develops. For a free, pluralist and just life for all the oppressed, all workers, in fact all circles of society, living by their own labor, these circles must relate to each other, in a kind of relationship to establish a mutual solidarity. And that would of course lead to a new form of international solidarity. This is a solidarity that does not aim to make others dependent on them or expand their own hegemony, but an international solidarity in the true sense. Because the system itself is a democratic one, based on mutual solidarity. And that is why it does not matter where in the world we find ourselves, this solidarity is based on the values of freedom and justice. No one will get the chance to bring the others under its influence to control them or assimilate them.

In this sense, the question is correct. The old paradigm of socialism, which was bound to the idea of state or rather the attempt of socialism, has not managed to build an internationalism. It has instead spawned new hegemonies.

In contrast Democratic Modernity, democratic confederalism prevents the formation of new hegemonies. In this system only relationships, alliances and solidarity relations based on justice and freedom should arise.

And this is a new form of internationalism.

group organizes itself and advocates for their own interests, then it will also be able to find solutions for the problems they experienced in the capitalist system.

It is a system that can offer solutions for national, religious and ethnic questions especially in the east. But it can be implemented even in the centres of capitalism. Because the problem of centralism also exists there. There too, larger segments of society are always excluded from the system or brutally exploited and suppressed by it. There too, the system increasingly threatens the minds, the hearts, the entire lives of the people. The system tries to direct these people as it wants. Therefore, there is a serious contradiction between those parts of society and the state created by the capitalist modernity. This offers the possibility that when there are issues of oppression and exploitation, of freedom and equality, solutions can be found on the basis of democratic autonomy. When the ideas and thoughts of democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism are spread, we believe that even in capitalist modernity new strategies and forms of organization to overcome the problems in this way will be found.

Is this system also a contemporary answer to proletarian internationalism?

First of all I want to say, that the model of democratic confederalism represents the solution for the social problems that created capitalist modernity in the era of the imperialist global finance capital. There are these problems in both the countries that capitalism calls developed, and in those countries who are exploited by capitalism. Obviously there are these problems everywhere. They range from unemployment to ethnic and cultural problems. An even greater problem is that people are deprived of their minds. They cannot understand their own reality any more. They cannot organize their own consciousness. There is the problem of militarism. There are state problems. There is the talk of a third world war. At any moment another new war could break out. So there is the question of war and peace. These are issues that affect the whole of mankind.

In some places, there are problems more acute and elsewhere there are still other problems. But these problems are all problems of mankind. And their cause is a 5,000-year ongoing state system. At the present time they are raised to unprecedented levels; they appear virtually insurmountable. And capitalist modernity is responsible for this; the 500-year-old capitalism.

The system of democratic confederalism is the expression of a path which provides a solution for these problems. And this applies to all parts of society. No matter in what area these problems occur, they can be met with a democratic organization of society. If we follow on we can, even if different problems prevail in different places, remedy them with the model of democratic modernity. The problem of militarism. There are state problems. There is the talk of a third world war. At any moment another new war could break out. So there is the question of war and peace. These are issues that affect the whole of mankind. In some places, there are problems more acute and elsewhere there are still other problems. But these problems are all problems of mankind. And their cause is a 5,000-year ongoing state system. At the present time they are raised to unprecedented levels; they appear virtually insurmountable. And capitalist modernity is responsible for this; the 500-year-old capitalism.

Under the current conditions the ruling forces, the bourgeoisie, the representatives of capitalist modernity have established an organization that prescribes to the rest of society that they have to be and to live according to their ideas, so according to the ideas of the rulers. They sort of impose their system on society. In contrast, the system of the democratic autonomy says: "No, you must not be like them. You are a part of society. You have your own culture, your own understanding of morality and an own life system. You can solve your own problems yourselves. Therefore, you have to develop and implement your own modernity, your own organization and your own life understanding." The chairman Apo has called this Democratic Modernity and in his defense writings he made the

appeal to the societal groups, no matter where in the world: Organize your own democratic modernity. You are not forced to live capitalism. You can also live democracy. That's why you can set up a free system based on pluralism, justice and solidarity. You can all independently organize and without being a state, build your lives together. And so you can overcome the problems of oppression and exploitation created by capitalism.

If people are ready to take this model of a solution for themselves, then it can be implemented anywhere in the world. With the real-socialist understanding of revolution it was said that the revolution will take place first in Europe. Then it was said, no, not in Europe but in Asia. Or no, first in the colonies or the less developed countries. Understanding democratic modernity overcomes such a view. Democratic modernity means organizing, to fill democratic socialism with life. Our chairman has formulated this as a theory and said that democratic modernity represents the system for democratic socialism. All over the world there are urgent problems. At the same time everywhere on the world revolutionary resistance can be lived and a revolutionary democratic organization can be created. And thus the social problems can be overcome. This is true from America to Europe, from Asia to Africa. But all have to tackle this according to their own problems.

If so, then of course internationalism gets a new meaning. It used to be that if a force somewhere preceded and managed to establish a state, this force would take over the leading role of internationalism. And then this force would spread internationalism everywhere. Over time it lost its function as internationalism and transformed into a form of hegemony. For example, the Soviet Union was criticized on the basis of this by other socialists even before its decay. They said that what they were doing was not internationalism, but a new form of hegemony in the name of socialism.

With this understanding, internationalism has been unable to develop. But with the understanding of democratic modernity the way for internationalism is reopened. Wherever the system