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government and the nationalists in control of the Kurdish enclave in the country, the fundamentalist Ayatollah government of Iran, the Syrian Baath dictatorship, or the intensely nationalist Erdoğan autocracy.

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Support?

So should we support the Kurdish experiment in Syria? Many leftists' knee jerk reaction is to propose that this experiment be the remedy to all the problems in the middle east, the mid-east revolution. This is despite the fact that the 1; the PKK being the vanguard for all revolution across the mid-east is an atrociously elitist idea and 2; the PKK only have the desire to defend and hold the Rojava region in accordance with Ocalan's "democratic autonomy". This is evident in the dealings the PKK is making right now with the Syrian government for an alliance in the wake of inaction by other powers against Turkish repression of the Kurdish forces. We can't speak for what the many different and contradictory tenancies of the left should "support". Anarcho-syndicalists have no interest in what Stalinists, Trotskyists, left communists, or "commisers" should support. The question for us is should Anarcho-syndicalists support the Kurdish experiment? The answer big picture is no.

Despite the mystification of what is going on what is actually happening is that another capitalist state is being constructed by another ruling class and nationalist group. The PKK's shift in ideology has only corresponded to the fact that they can no longer engage in Stalinist insurgency with the Turkish state and are left to defend some abandoned Syrian cantons. This is not to say that there is nothing for Anarcho-syndicalists to get behind. Anarcho-syndicalists should be for the struggle against ISIS by the Kurdish ethnic minority, full self-determination for this group in the form of an inclusive free society with no states, or ethnic conflict, and the struggle of Kurdish women against patriarchy. Unfortunately the power of the PKK, Ocalan's personality cult, and the PYD have severely limited all of these positive developments, or prospects. Ultimately Anarcho-syndicalists should support Kurdish women, workers, and peasants in the self-organized overthrow of their masters whether they be the PKK and PYD, ISIS, the Iraqi US puppet

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land through peasant agricultural communes that was federated together through worker and peasant self-organization of society.

The other major aspect of the experiment that is heavily touted is the women's movement of which the the YPJ is a part. There is actually some real content to this. There were uprisings of Kurdish people in Turkey (the PKK were largely absent from them existing up in the mountains away from the struggle). Kurdish people came into violent conflict and clashes with the Turkish state. In this movement women participants asserted themselves as a key aspect of the struggle not willing to be pinned down by patriarchy. This gestating women's movement ultimately entered the PKK struggle. For the PKK's part it always had a concept similar to the "new Soviet man" which argued that the national liberation struggle would turn the Kurdish man into a model soldier and being, always respectful, always ready to fight for all kurds, always kind, always gentle when need be, but always conceding when the need to be the opposite arises. This Kurdish man would be the perfectly balanced independent Kurd. This theory was transferred on to the womens' movement as both an expectation and immense obligation. It was thus turned into a new Kurdish women theory which puts social pressure on women to be model fighters for Kurdish freedom and their own autonomy. Ironically women are controlled through gender roles into being model soldiers against patriarchy and for Kurdish liberation. Many leftists and supporters have brandished around pictures of YPJ fighters holding guns and looking tough. These are part of a marketing strategy by the PKK to get western support and the orientalist display of attractive brown women with guns has unfortunately been quite a successful marketing strategy at that. While the women's movement is something of an organic feminist struggle against patriarchy, the feminist ideology created by the PKK is mainly just a new form of patriarchy.

revolution during the Spanish Civil War. Something which fuels this idea is the advent of communal councils in the territory. The authority of the communal councils however is severely limited. They only handle small day to day affairs rather than running the society. As to some kind of socialism, libertarian or not, socialism can not be accomplished in one territory as it is a whole new mode of production that is designed to abolish world capitalism. A society carrying out a socialist revolution would be one where the working class has taken control of production and is constructing a new organization of it, where peasants exist they would be taking control of land and turning it into a commons. This is the only way to establish collective ownership of the means of production. This is not what is happening in Rojava. Private property is preserved within the constitution and an official from the PYD said that it is allowed to exist as long as it "does not interfere with communal property". For those unaware, private property is the capitalist relation where the means of production become commodities on the market owned, sold, and bought by those with the immense wealth to do so effectively severing the actual producers from any control over them. The main tenet of socialism is the abolition of this relation to production. There is no socialism, or socialist revolution in Rojava.

What about statelessness? Well there isn't any of that either. Jails, police, and a standing army have been erected in the region. The PYD has effectively become the ruling party imposing it's rule over the peasants and workers. There is even representative democracy with the Peoples' Democratic Party, or HDP standing in elections. If a state has not already been constructed certainly the beginnings of one are being put into place. Effectively no kind of Anarchist opposition to the state, or libertarian socialism has been established, or fought for in the Kurdish experiment. Alternatively the Spanish Revolution of 1936 referred to by Graeber saw control of production through workers' councils and control of

The author of Rage Against Capital takes a critical Anarcho-syndicalist look at "The Rojava Revolution".

Since 2014 the left has been smitten. During that year the forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party and the People's Protection Units successfully defended Kobane, a Syrian region, from the forces of the Islamic State. Anthropologist and self-proclaimed "Anarchist", David Graeber, of Occupy Movement fame, wrote an article essentially shouting for international attention and support for these anti-ISIS fighters. He compared this conflict to the Spanish Civil War where revolutionary Anarchists fought against Fascists comparing the Kurdistan Workers' Party and People's Protection Units with the Anarcho-syndicalists of the Durruti Column, CNT, and FAI while comparing ISIS to the Francoist nationalists. After that article appeared the mainstream media started declaring an "Anarchist" revolution in Kobane and the surrounding regions under the control of these forces, Rojava. Every tendency of the radical left have come out in support of these forces ever since running the gamete from Stalinists to especially Anarchists.[1] Some of the only skeptics have been "communisers" in the case of Giles Dauve.[2] and

[1] The backing of the SDF by the United States has lead some leftists not to support the Kurdish experiment in Syria. Some, such as CrimethInc, once again ironically, argue that this is only happening because the Kurdish forces need help to survive within a civil war. This realpolitik ethical maneuvering is alien to revolutionary politics. The point of the revolutionary approach is to radically undermine the dominant institutions in society, not participate in them when convenient. Even beyond this the reason for taking the support is not "survival", things are not nearly so dire although they have certainly become more dire recently. The PKK and PYD are aspiring ruling groups who like money and guns. To me US support is definitely a point against he Kurdish experiment, though this reality may quickly be subject to drastic change. The US has shown no interest in defending the Kurdish forces from Turkey and this reality in the wake of the brutal Afrin invasion has lead the YPG to make alliances with the United States' bitter enemy in the Assad government.

[2] Kurdistan?, Giles Dauve

the Orthodox Trotskyist International Communist League who in fact called for support of ISIS against the the Kurdish forces[3].

This endless support from the international left for the Kurdish forces in Rojava has not gone away. Westerners, many have been leftists, have gone to Rojava, fought with the Kurdish forces, even died, and are still fighting. This Kurdish movement has been especially important for Anarchists over the past four years. Under the control of these Kurdish forces an experiment has taken place in Rojava which puts emphasis, among other things, on communal popular control of the running of running of society. This has lead Anarchists, who have likely often been strung along by the mainstream media, to think of this social experiment as an anti-state project for communal self-management. Such values are the very nerve center of the Anarchist political philosophy and movement. The significance of this experiment for Anarchists was inflamed by the fact that it's leader and principle architect, Obdullah Ocalan, was apparently influenced by Anarchist ecologist Murray Bookchin. Even the individualist Anarchists CrimethInc have declared their support despite opposing direct democracy and most types of formal organization[4].

As an Anarchist, I don't see things this way and side with the group of Anarchists who have been critical of the Rojava experiment. I've attempted tackling this issue numerous times. Most of my attempts no longer exist for consumption, but the large article which I wrote on the subject when I was still a relatively knew writer is still available in some places and in fact garnered some attention. My successive failures have lead me to take one more stab at outlining a critical Anarchist approach to this issue. I feel that I can finally deliver an analysis I am happy with based on my current skills as a thinker and writer. This analysis will start with an

[3] Down With The US War Against ISIS!, ICL

[4] Understanding the Kurdish Resistance Historical Overview & Eyewitness Report, CrimethInc

Key Ideas and Whether They Are Anarchist/Libertarian Socialist

Democratic confederalism is an ideology which pushes communal self-organization of the Kurdish people against nation-states. Ocalan defines nation-states as ancient institutions of domination that must be unraveled by progressive movements and peoples. Democratic confederalism argues that self-managed communities should confederate to organize the whole of society. Anarchists oppose nation-states and advocate federated and self-managed councils run society, however this is not all Anarchism is. Anarchism is libertarian socialist which means that it sees the freedom of humanity based upon the realization of a socialist society. Socialism is the collective ownership of the means of production by the whole people. Additionally this can only be achieved, for libertarian socialists, through the self-organization of the working class against capitalism. The PKK shirked organization of the working class a long time ago as we have seen and democratic confederalism has pretty much nothing to say about the organization of production whether along socialist lines, or not. Calling the PKK's ideology libertarian socialist, or Anarchist is thus a far stretch. Despite this those arguing for the PKK's nature as a libertarian socialist organization may still have an argument in terms of the actual experiment going on in Rojava. It could be the case that the Rojava experiment is being carried out along libertarian socialist lines despite the ideology itself not necessarily being libertarian socialist.

The Nature Of The Experiment, Stateless Democracy?

It is often claimed that what is being done in Rojava is some kind of direct democracy without a state. David Graeber certainly thinks so comparing the Rojava experiment to the Anarchist social

matter of a decade, or so? This would mirrior such strange turns as Victor Serge becoming a Bolshevik, or Gregori Maximoff quitting the red army and becoming a fore most theorist of Anarcho-syndicalist and bitter enemy of the red bureaucracy (though the last example was obviously positive). It would indeed be extremely positive if the PKK transformed into a libertarian socialist organization, but how true is this version of events? Well, the PKK did undergo a major ideological shift, but as I shall argue it's libertarian, or even socialist content is deeply questionable at best.

In 1999, Ocalan who had fled the country was captured abroad. He was brought to stand trial in a Turkish court. Upon being questioned about the PKK's violent nationalist tenancies he vigorously denied this. He claimed that the PKK was a peaceful organization at it's heart and only wanted what he now called "democratic autonomy" from the Turkish government. He painted a picture of a democratic Kurdish enclave independent from and having peaceful relations with Turkey. Ocalan had switched on a dime under pressure of the state from a nationalist who wanted and carried out open insurgency to a peaceful democrat. The myth goes that Ocalan inaugurated the new ideological stance of the PKK as a result of reading Murray Bookchin, but in fact it started with this new position created under the pressure of the Turkish state. While serving his prison sentence Ocalan would become ideologically devoted to this democratic autonomy and develop it into a coherent theory and practice.

Ocalan's forces who had avoided capture went underground and eventually took over a swathe of territory abandoned by the Syrian government. Through his strong cult of personality Ocalan ideologically restructured the PKK according to this democratic ideology. Ocalan would lay down in writing what is now essentially the PKK's guiding ideological stance. He called this theory "democratic confederalism". We will describe it in the ideas section. The PKK gained international attention when it's YPG forces defended Kobane against ISIS successfully.

introduction to the key players in this experiment, go through it's history to introducing the key concepts, and then come to a conclusion based on reasoned argument from an Anarcho-syndicalist perspective.

Key Players

There are many players in the Kurdish experiment, even other groups like the Kurdistan Workers' Party exist in other regions. The main players are the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), People's Protection Units (YPG), Women's Protection Units (YPJ), Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian Defense Forces (SDF), and the PKK's leader Abdullah Ocalan. The People's Protection Units are the armed wing of the experiment and have been leading a long fight against ISIS. The Women's Protection Units are an autonomous armed group with an all women membership designed to be a mechanism of the feminist aspect of the experiment, more on that will come later. The idea behind the YPJ is that women are given a specific armed detachment to carry out their self-determined struggle. The PKK is the oldest player in the experiment in terms of it's development leading to the experiment itself. It was originally a Kurdish Stalinist and national liberation party, analogous to groups such as the Shinning Path in Peru, Naxalites in India, or the Communist Party of the Philippines and it's adjacent organization National Democratic Front. After carrying out a well over decade long war with the Turkish state it was repressed and re-oriented it's ideology after the political and ideological development of it's leader.

Abdullah Ocalan is the experiment's ideological architect to the point where the adherents of the experiment's ideology directly invoke him as it's thinker. He is a Kurdish radical who's main aim is Kurdish autonomy, a goal watered down from his original devotion of an independent Kurdish nation, though supporters would

describe this as an ideological evolution. The PYD is the main governmental organization in Rojava, I would refer to it as the ruling party and will make that case later. It was the group which took control of the Rojava territory originally. The SDF is essentially a US proxy. On the ground in the region it is often referred to as "Washington" and is directly supplied and funded by the US. This could change, as we will examine later, as a result of the US' recent unofficial decision to allow the Turkish state to have it's way with the Kurdish experiment. This organization exists to carry out the United States' war against groups such as ISIS.

History Of The PKK And The Kurdish Experiment

This history starts in the Turkish left and with Ocalan himself. Turkey was established by the Soviet Union and as such it's left has been historically Stalinist and nationalist, though nationalism is certainly fueled by Turkey's dominant nationalist ideology. Ocalan lived in the Kurdish populated areas in Turkey and went to Ankara (Turkish capital) as a young man for study purposes. There he became wrapped up in Turkish leftism, but, as a member of the persecuted Kurdish minority he was unhappy with the fact that the Turkish left generally called for Turkish independence and completely ignored the plight of the Kurds who have been a de-facto illegal ethnic group in the country since it's founding. Ocalan thus set out to create a version of the nationalist Stalinism he encountered in Ankara that focused on Kurdish national liberation (the achievement of an independent nation-state). Upon returning to the Kurdish region of Turkey, often called "Kurdistan", Ocalan set about recruiting fighters for the cause of Kurdish independence, thus the Kurdistan Workers' Party was born.

The early PKK's ideology was Stalinist and Kurdish nationalist. It's aim became to destroy the Turkish state and institute an

independent Kurdish nation ruled by the PKK as the ruling communist party (the last part being in line with the Stalinist practice of rule through party states). Although traditional Stalinism put an emphasis on working class agency and emancipation in order to associate itself with historic Marxist and socialist goals the PKK, coming from "Kurdistan" which was populated mostly by peasants openly washed their hands of such appeals. They openly stated that the class nature of the Kurdish independence struggle in Turkey was that of the peasantry, not the working class. While the PKK would eventually drop this form of Stalinism it is telling that they dropped all together the class which socialists view as the motive force for the revolution against capitalism early on, given it's reputation for being a left-wing/anti-capitalist, or socialist group. The PKK would enter into a protracted war with the Turkish state which started in the late 70s and ended in the late 90s with Ocalan's capture by the state. This war was bloody and thousands of civilians were caught in the cross hairs between state repression and the fight of a reckless guerrilla force. Going back to the earlier comparisons with other Stalinist guerrilla groups such as the Naxalites and the Shinning Path, the PKK essentially was one of these groups. It was a Stalinist party trying to wage a socialist revolution through the struggle of a small military minority which resulted in defeat, slaughter of peasants and workers, and state repression.

Up to the end of the war with the state the PKK was thus effectively an opportunistic Stalinist organization trying to carry out a power grab through elitist blood letting. This is hardly the kind of thing radicals, let alone Anarchists, should level their support for. It's not that Anarchists aren't aware of the organization's Stalinist past, the idea is that it has undergone a major evolution in theory and practice towards libertarian socialism, Anarchism, and communal autonomy. This is theoretically plausible, but it really nudges the bull crap detector. How does a self-appointed vanguard in all of it's authoritarianism and staunch nationalism, things which it's members fought and died for, move to libertarian socialism in a