

# Anarchism in Rojava

Rev Dia

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At a time when the far right is shooting civilians in mosques, anarchist forces are at the forefront and are truly at war with ISIS. Detachments of anarchist internationalists are taking an active part in the Syrian conflict, fighting Islamic State, dictator Assad, Turkish imperialism, and, most importantly, automatically promoting ideas of self-government and direct popular control.

The Syrian civil war is a long-standing, multilateral, multi-level armed conflict that began in the spring of 2011 as a local civil confrontation and gradually escalated into an uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, which eventually involved not only major countries but also international organizations, military-political groups and world powers. Initially, hostilities took place between the government army and the Free Syrian Army (ISA). The main organization of the Syrian opposition was the Syrian National Council (SNA), which at that time included all anti-government factions. However, the opposition later split, with Kurdish organizations being the first to form their own government (the Supreme Kurdish Council), and in 2013 the most radical Islamist groups forming the Islamic Front. Due to the split in the ranks of the rebels, the position of the ICA has significantly weakened, and its role has receded into the background. A leading role in the confrontation between government forces has been played by various Islamist groups, the most capable of which are the terrorist organizations Front al-Nusra (a local branch of al-Qaeda) and the Islamic State.

The first units of ISIS militants appeared in Syria in January 2014 in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo. At the same time, they captured Manbij (in 2013 the population was about 80 thousand people) in the province of Aleppo. The city became one of the first Syrian settlements conquered by terrorists. In the summer of 2014, terrorists advanced into the province of Raqqa and seized its administrative center by July. Raqqa became the capital of the so-called "Islamic State". At the same time, terrorists were operating in Iraq. ISIL's rapid offensive and terrorist seizures of large areas of Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2014 prompted military intervention by the United States and its allies, which since September 2014 have carried out air strikes on Islamist positions in Syria. On September 30, 2015, in agreement with President Bashar al-Assad, the military operation in Syria was launched by the Air Force of the Russian Federation, acting in close coordination with government troops.

According to the UN, by 2015, about 220,000 people had died in the conflict. The war was one of the main causes of the European migration crisis, causing a mass exodus of refugees from Syria. The conflict is characterized by fierce fighting, indiscriminate shelling of settlements, mass

killings and numerous war crimes against civilians, and the country's economy and infrastructure have suffered enormous damage. And in this bloody meat grinder there was a place for anarchists.

The International Freedom Battalion, usually abbreviated IFB or EÖT, is an armed group of left-wing foreign volunteers fighting on the side of Kurdish People's Self-Defense Forces in the Syrian civil war in support of the Rosary Revolution and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The formation of the International Freedom Battalion was announced on June 10, 2015. The International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War became an inspiration for the fighters. Although the participants represent different political views, most are anarchists.

The Rojava Autonomous Region, as it exists today, is one of the few bright spots between the dictatorial regime of Assad and ISIS. By ousting supporters of the Assad regime in 2011 and despite the hostility of virtually all of its neighbors, Rozawa not only retains its independence but is the most democratic country in terms of dictatorial neighbors. Although Rozawa itself is a full-fledged state with a police force, where the Kurdistan Workers' Party is the main decision-making body, people's assemblies are developing on the ground. Councils and the people's militia were also formed, and part of the means of production came under the control of self-governing workers' cooperatives, despite constant attacks by the far-right forces of the Islamic State. Although the Kurds are not without flaws, they are extremely progressive, especially against the background of the surrounding cannibalistic dictatorships. For example, there is a quota for women. Their number in the councils should be at least 40 percent, but sometimes more. The economic situation is very difficult due to the general crisis related to the war and the fact that much of Kurdistan is in a resource-poor desert.

The council, for example, may oblige the store owner not to overcharge if there is a complaint from residents. About 20% of the economy is in the hands of self-government. And because of the general economic and military crisis in the region, the issue of unemployment is very acute, workers in cooperatives from time to time alternate to give others the opportunity to earn and at the same time learn to bake or sew in a sewing cooperative and cafeteria. Employees divide wages equally. Part of the earnings is left to the development of the enterprise (purchase of fabrics or products, payment for electricity). All issues related to production and its development, as well as the team, are decided by a vote of workers. The activities of cooperatives are coordinated by councils. The main economic activity in Rozawa is agriculture. In the 1990s, the regime's current policies denied the Kurds as part of the Syrians. The Kurds were "banned" from citizenship, losing their right to their own home or land. After that, the Arabs were sent to colonize the lands taken from the Kurds. So these people got big chunks of land. When the Syrian civil war broke out, they sided with the regime or fled Syria altogether. Thus, their former large plots of land were distributed among cooperatives and began to be managed directly by collectives. Refugees who need work usually go to these cooperatives and work there. Agricultural goods are used directly by the commune as a kind of social assistance, so that all poor people can come to the community and say: "I have no food" and get it, which is why no one dies of starvation in Rozawa.

It should be noted that the principle of decision-making together and on the basis of mutual assistance is one of the keys to survival in difficult conditions.

All this has attracted the attention of anarchists from around the world. International groups of anarchists are not only fighting the Kurds, but are also actively promoting their ideas among the population. However, as many foreign Kurdish volunteers say and have a high level of political

education, many have freely quoted Proudhon, Bakunin and Murray Bukchin. As one social activist who visited Kurdistan mentioned:

“We were invited to the young apologists, very zealous young girls and boys. Anarchists from different countries were also guests: Germans, Spaniards, Americans. And due to the fact that the guy, who knew Kurdish and English well, did not come immediately, but everyone wanted to communicate, drawings, diagrams, visual aids from the material at hand were in progress. We talked about the ways to build a better future. Argued, argued. But it was a friendly dispute and a very warm atmosphere. One of the young apologists began to show on a box of cookies the superiority of mutual aid over individualism. The capitalist will try to take the whole box, at best, will leave some crumbs to others. And the anarchist will share so that everyone has enough, and everyone will be satisfied. And as the cookies were real and edible, the advantage of this approach was obvious. When the anarchist, who could translate well into English, came, the discussion intensified. I caught myself thinking that this is a kind of fantasy: the Middle East, the war of all against all, and here are people from different countries sitting and discussing how to change the world together, share their ideas. And everyone is trying to understand each other.”

One of the anarchists fighting in the ranks of internationalists described the role and prospects of anarchists' participation in the conflict as follows:

“From an anarchist's point of view, this is not an anarchist revolution. There are elements of the ideology of anarchism, at least that's very good. But this does not mean that we should not support a revolutionary process in which the participants are not 100% anarchists. But also we should not be fools and think: “Oh, this is the new Spain of the 36<sup>th</sup>, the new Spanish Revolution”, No, this is not the case. The Kurdish movement is not the CNT or the FAI. It has many specific features similar to anarchism, but they do not come from the ideology of anarchism, but from local, old traditions. You know, we have to work on this and not be fools. When you blindly support something and then something goes wrong, you are very disappointed. In such cases, excessive optimism leads to disappointment, so you need to be a little pragmatic and see the whole picture. But I think this is still the only place in the world where we see a real revolution happening, and it is really interesting for every revolutionary to see and study this revolution, its experience, to learn what works and what doesn't. The last time anarchists took part in the revolution was about 60 or 70 years ago. Since then, everything has changed: the world, the way it works, the economy, the people, etc. We have an idea only from our previous experience of what works and what does not, but much has changed. For example, economics. Now it's all over the world, if you're starting a revolution in a region, you have to think about how to provide people with everything they need, and it's not like in the past. Or look at the war. Example: a plane changed the face of war. Now it is not enough to have a rifle to defend the revolution in your territory, as it was during the revolution in Spain. On the other hand, the revolution in Spain was shattered by the

onslaught of large numbers of troops: a tactic that is unlikely to work in the current environment. The accuracy of aircraft today is insane. Drones can use dynamite instead of guerrillas, etc. It is very important for us to study this experience in order to draw the right conclusion: the way of organization, the way of protection, the process of spreading our ideals, what we will offer to people. As I can tell from my experience, there is something to think about in order to be able to create your own organization in the future to carry out a revolution. ”

Through active participation in this armed conflict, anarchists gain valuable experience in modern warfare. We must also mention the tragic aspect of the return of anarchists to arms. Since 2012, at least a dozen of our like-minded people, and possibly several dozen, have died on the fields of the Syrian war. Such necessary experience is given by anarchists at a high price. On the other hand, the success of our comrades cannot fail to inspire. The war continues, and we want to hope that in the end the ideas of direct democracy will win.

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