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Rojava: Fantasies and Realities

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November 8th, 2014

The Kobane resistance that has passed its 45th day as of now has caused the attention of revolutionaries all over the world to turn to Rojava. As a result of the work carried out by Revolutionary Anarchist Action, anarchist comrades from many parts of the world have sent messages of solidarity to the Kobane resistance.¹ This internationalist stance without a doubt carries great importance for the people resisting in Kobane. However if we do not analyze what is happening in all its truth and if we romanticize instead, our dreams will turn to disappointment in short order.

Furthermore, in order to create the worldwide revolutionary alternative that is urgently needed, we must be cool-headed and realistic, and we have to make correct assessments. On this point let us mention in passing that these solidarity messages that have been sent on the occasion of the Kobane resistance demonstrate the urgency of the task of creating an international association where revolutionary anarchists and

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Retrieved on 16th August 2020 from
<https://www.anarkismo.net/article/27575>

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¹ <http://meydangazetesi.org/gundem/2014/10/dunya-anarsistlerinden-kobane-dayanismasi/>

libertarian communists can discuss local and global issues and be in solidarity during struggles. We have felt the lack of such an international during the last four years when many social upheavals took place in many parts of the world – we at least felt this need during the uprising that took place in June 2013 in Turkey.

Today however we must discuss Rojava without illusions and base our analyses on the right axis. It is not very easy for a person to evaluate the developments that happen within the time frame they live in according only to what they see in that moment. Evidently, assessments made with minds clouded with feelings of being cornered and despair make it even harder for us to produce healthy answers.

Nowhere on the world today exists an effective revolutionary movement in our sense of the term or a strong class movement that can be a precursor of such a movement. The struggles that do emerge fade either through being violently repressed or by being drawn in to the system. It seems that because of this, just as in the case of an important part of Marxists and anarchists in Turkey, revolutionary organizations and individuals in various parts of the world are imbuing a meaning to the structure that has emerged in Rojava that is beyond its reality. Before all else, it is unfair for us to load the burden of our failure to create a revolutionary alternative in places we live and the fact that social opposition is largely co-opted in to the system on to the shoulders of the persons struggling in Rojava. That Rojava, where the economy is to a large extent agricultural, and is surrounded by imperialist blocs led on the one hand by Russia and on the other hand by the USA, repressive, reactionary and collaborator regimes in the area and brutal jihadist organizations like ISIS which have thrived in this environment. In that sense, it is equally problematic to attribute a mission to Rojava that is beyond what it is or what it can be or to blame those people engaged in

a life and death struggle for expecting support from Coalition forces or not carrying out “a revolution to our liking”.

First of all we must identify that the Rojava process has progressive features such as an important leap in the direction of women’s liberation, that a secular, pro-social justice, pluralist democratic structure is attempted to be constructed and that other ethnic and religious groups are given a part in the administration. However, the fact that the newly emerging structure does not aim at the elimination of private property, that is the abolition of classes, that the tribal system remains and that tribal leaders partake in the administration shows that the aim is not the removal of feudal or capitalist relations of production but is instead in their own words “the construction of a democratic nation”.

We must also remember that the PYD is a part of the political structure led by Abdullah Ocalan for 35 years which aims at national liberation and the political limitations that all nationally oriented movements have apply to the PYD as well. Furthermore, the influence of elements that belong to the ruling class inside of the Kurdish movement is constantly increasing with the “solution process”, especially in Turkey. On this point, it is helpful to examine the KCK Contract that defines the democratic confederalism that forms the basis of the political system in Rojava.² A few points in the introduction written by Ocalan deserve our attention:

*“This system is one that takes into account ethnic, religious and class differences on a social basis.” (..)
“Three systems of law will apply in Kurdistan: EU law, unitary state law, democratic confederal law.”*

In summary, it is stated that class society will remain and there will be a federal political system compatible with the global system and the nation state. In concert with this, article

² http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/KCK_S%C3%B6zle%C5%9Fmesi

8 of the Contract, titled “Personal, Political Rights and Freedoms” defends private property and section C of article 10 titled “Basic Responsibilities” defines the constitutional basis of mandatory military service as it states “In the case of a war of legitimate defense, as a requirement of patriotism, there is the responsibility to actively join the defense of the homeland and basic rights and freedoms.” While the Contract states that the aim is not political power, we also understand that the destruction of the state apparatus is also not aimed, meaning the goal is autonomy within existing nation states. When the Contract is viewed in its entirety, the goal that is presented is seen not to be beyond a bourgeois democratic system that is called democratic confederalism. To summarize, while the photos of two women bearing rifles that are frequently spread on social media, one taken in the Spanish Civil War, the other taken in Rojava do correspond to a similarity in the sense of women fighting for their freedoms, it is clear that the persons fighting ISIS in Rojava do not at this point have the same goals and ideals as the workers and poor peasants that fought within the CNT-FAI in order to remove the state and private property altogether. Furthermore, there are serious differences between the two processes in terms of conditions of emergence, the class positions of their subjects, the political lines of those running the process and the strength of the revolutionary movement worldwide.

In this situation, we must neither be surprised by, nor blame the PYD if they are forced to abandon even their current position, in order to found an alliance with regional and global powers to break the ISIS siege. We cannot expect persons struggling in Kobane to abolish the world scale hegemony of capitalism or to resist this hegemony for long. This task can only be realized by a strong worldwide class movement and revolutionary alternative.

Capitalism is in a crisis at the global level and imperialists who are trying to transcend this crisis by exporting war to every corner of the world, together with policies of repressive

regimes in the region have turned Syria and Iraq into a living hell. Under conditions where a revolutionary alternative is not in existence, the social uprising that emerged in Ukraine against the pro-Russian and corrupt government resulted in fascist-backed pro-EU forces coming to power and the war between two imperialist camps continues. Racism and fascism is rising fast in European countries. In Turkey, political crises come one after the other and the ethnic and sectarian division in society is deepening. While under these circumstances, Rojava may appear as a lifeline to hold on to, we must consider that beyond the military siege of ISIS, Rojava is also under the political siege of forces like Turkey, Barzani and the Free Syrian Army. As long as Rojava is not backed by a worldwide revolutionary alternative for it to rest upon, it seems that it will not be easy for Rojava to maintain even its current position in the long run.

The path not only to defend Rojava physically and politically and to carry it further lies in creating a class based grounds for organizing and struggle, and a related strong and globally organized revolutionary alternative. The same applies for preventing the atmosphere of ethnic, religious and sectarian conflict that draws the peoples of the region further in by each passing day, and preventing laborers from sliding into right-wing radicalism in the face of capitalism’s world level crisis. Solidarity with Kobane, while important is insufficient. Beyond this, we need to see that discussing what needs to be done to create a revolutionary process, and organizing for this at the international level everywhere we are is imperative not only for those resisting in Kobane but millions of laborers all over the world.