K.B., Anarkismo.net Editorial Group
Rojava: An Anarcho-Syndicalist Perspective & An Anarchist Communist Reply

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Rojava: An Anarcho-Syndicalist Perspective & An Anarchist Communist Reply

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make it clear that we simultaneously reject nationalism. What is needed, therefore, to ensure the full national and class liberation of the Kurdish masses and to guard against the ascendency of an oppressive Kurdish elite, which would oppose the full liberation of the Kurdish working class under the guise of narrow nationalist interests, is a Kurdish working class-centred struggle – on a working class programme – against national oppression, capitalism, the state and women's oppression simultaneously. The PKK's programme of democratic confederalism, to us, represents steps towards such a programme. It is not enough, but it is a start we can engage.

In summary, applying our general approach, we can say of the battle for Rojava: we support the struggle for the national liberation of the Kurds, including the right of the national liberation movement to exist; second, we oppose the repression and threats meted out by forces ranging from the Islamic State, to Iraq, Syria, Turkey and their Western and Eastern allies; our support moves on a sliding scale, with Kurdish anarchists and syndicalists at the top, followed by the PKK, then the PYD, and we draw the line at the KRG; in practical terms, we cooperate around, and offer solidarity (even if only verbal) on a range of concrete issues, the most immediate of which is the battle to halt the ultra-right Islamic State and defend the Rojava revolution; within that revolution, we align ourselves with the PKK model of democratic confederalism against the more statist approach of the PYD models, and, even when doing so, aim at all times to propose and win influence for our methods, aims and projects: we are with the PKK against the KRG, but we are for the anarchist revolution before all else.

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people and, even if they don't achieve democratic confederalism, a PYD-led state would still be some gain (like 1994 was in South Africa) because the other possible outcomes are horrendous.

Naturally, the struggle for Kurdish liberation, if not accompanied by a massive reconstruction of the economy and of social life along the lines of workers' self-management and community control, will lead to a situation of incomplete national and gender liberation for the Kurdish masses if economic and social inequalities are not resolved at the same time as those of political power.

Such a strictly political solution (i.e. if parliamentary models triumphed over democratic confederalism) could give rise to a new Kurdish elite. Something which could be compared to the democratic transition that occurred in South Africa in 1994 and, while not ideal, would certainly constitute a massive advance for the Kurdish working class – just as it was for the South African working class.

We agree with "K.B." that it is precisely in the self-activity of the grassroots masses and women of the PKK and allied structures that the most promising prospects for struggle in the direction of complete liberation lie. However, it would be a mistake to reject or refuse support to organisations like the PKK on the grounds that they are flawed. Of course they are. That is not the issue, the issue is whether anarchists align with – and try to influence – actual real world movements and struggles, as a matter of principle (because these struggles are just), as a matter of practical politics (because without engagement, anarchists will remain isolated) and as a mode of analysis (which grapples with situations, rather than hammering them into preset schemas).

That is ultimately where the deep difference in the two lines – ours and that of "K.B." – lies. We reject notions that insist anarchists must never support national liberation struggles – or that they only do so under certain conditions – while we also

"K.B.'s" article suffers from the fact that it is written in a kind of vacuum. It is written as if some sort of pure anarchism is the only thing that can be supported which – considering that any anarchist society is a very distant prospect at best and will have to be forged and shaped in the reality of struggle, and may differ in some ways from the ideal vision – is a view divorced from reality. So the article is written based on what exists in the writers head and not what is happening in reality – which is what we as anarchists and social revolutionaries have to deal with if we and our ideas are to have any relevance in progressive popular struggles.

Under the current circumstances of ISIS invading Kobane, even if democratic confederalism is defeated in Rojava internally by PYD elements and they implement a state, that state (from what we have read of the PYD) would be better than the other options that are real possibilities, being ISIS, Assad, or the KRG.

If applied, for example, to South Africa and apartheid the position on Rojava presented by this article, therefore, would amount to saying something like "we don't support the UDF, FOSATU or COSATU and definitely not the ANC because they are not anarchists", and that would have amounted to saying, "who really cares if the apartheid state wins because there is no struggle for anarchism".

The position presented in the article is thus flawed and divorced from reality. While it might sound radical in writing, its weakness is that it presupposes the existence of a perfectly libertarian and revolutionary subject and premises any support for popular movements on this non-entity instead of acknowledging that the actually existing working class – and its movements – is full of contradictions and that anarchists need to meet it where it is if our ideas and practices are to have any relevance.

The struggle for the national liberation of the Kurds should be supported as a matter of principle as they are an oppressed

Rojava: An Anarcho-Syndicalist Perspective

by K.B.

> "*The principal problem of national liberation struggle for the anti-statist anarcho-syndicalist form of organisation is that it is inherently statist. Advocating a more local form of state, the national liberation movement bows to the idea that the state is a desirable institution – just not in the current form. As such, it has the fundamental flaw that, if successful, it will generate a new state – which may or may not be 'worse' than the current oppressor, but it will nevertheless be an oppressive mechanism.*" – Solidarity Federation

> "*Anarchists refuse to participate in national liberation fronts; they participate in class fronts which may or may not be involved in national liberation struggles. The struggle must spread to establish economic, political and social structures in the liberated territories, based on federalist and libertarian organisations.*" - Alfredo Maria Bonanno

As this is published there come news reports that the Islamic State (ISIS) has been almost completely pushed out of the city of Kobane, party headquarters of Democratic Union Party

(PYD) the Syrian affiliate party to the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), their co-president Saleh Muslim calling such developments the liberation of Kobane.[1] Hopefully as such progress in the region moves forward anarcho-syndicalists and social revolutionaries of all tendencies can start to objectively discuss the situation in West Kurdistan without the emotional reflex to a population under siege, facing a humanitarian disaster.

Anarcho-syndicalists should should hold no illusions about the Rojava Revolution. Since the turn of the millenium there have been reports of a libertarian municipalist turn in the Kurdish national liberation struggle inspired by Murray Bookchin. This change in politics has been lead by jailed founder and ideological leader Abdullah Öcalan of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) who discovered Bookchin while in prison. The PKK a former Maoist/Stalinist organization had turned to ethnic nationalism after the fall of the Soviet Union and discreditation of "really existing socialism" and so such a turn has been welcomed by many on the revolutionary left. However such processes of political transformation do not automatically translate to full adoption within a populace nevermind their official representation in leading parties.

After the start of the Syrian mass uprising and resultant civil war a power vacuum was created where the forces of Assad, tyrannical head of state in Syria, left Western Kurdistan, known as Rojava, to the Kurds. At first the Free Syrian Army (FSA) a so called moderate opposition force tied to Western Imperialism attacked the Kurdish forces but was soon repelled. In this open situation the PYD and it's armed militias the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) decided to implement their now long held program of democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism on the ground.

[1] "The air-strikes were very very successful. In a short time, we will report to the world liberation of Kobane." -Saleh Muslim http://

But it is also still possible that Rojava could become a system based on democratic confederalism because assemblies, councils and communes do exist (and because clearly there are also people that want this). So it doesn't seem to us that we should close our eyes to the fact that such tensions and possibly conflicting outcomes do exist and will exist as part of any revolution. Which one will gain the upper hand if Rojava survives, though, is open to question and depends on which forces gain the upper hand in the process, if they are not all wiped out by ISIS or the pashmerga (the armed units of the KRG).

CONCLUSION

The best outcome in any world would be global anarchist revolution. But the mighty forces required do not currently exist; nor will they come to exist if anarchists insist on keeping their hands too clean, failing to engage real world moments and movements.

Realistically, the best outcome in the real world Rojava would be the victory of democratic confederalism, opening up space for further changes, and inspiring rebels elsewhere. The second best would be a PYD-led state, and the third best would be a victory of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which is to the right of both the PKK and PYD. The KRG is a fully-fledged state (although not internationally recognised) that is corrupt and overtly authoritarian. At the worst end of the spectrum would be the victory of the Syrian dictator, Assad, and the worst outcome would be the victory of the Islamic State/ ISIS.

There is no real anarchist contender in this battle, and no prospects for an anarchist pole of attraction while anarchists do not engage with forces like the PKK. Kurdish and Turkish anarchists have involved themselves, and so too, in a more modest way, have groups linked to Anarkismo.net.

the anarchists from other forces, we seek to do this by engaging, as an independent current, with other forces.

This does mean making our own views clear, pushing our own project, and seeking our own influence. Such influence cannot come from purist isolation, nor can it come from liquidationist cheerleading. It entails critical engagement: we are with the PKK and the Rojava revolution against the forces of the Islamic State/ISIS, of Turkey and of Western imperialism, but we are also not a PKK auxiliary.

Therefore, despite our disagreements with "K.B's" position, we in fact agree that there are points he or she raises that are worth soberly engaging.

"K.B." notes that there are parallel – and potentially rival – structures and projects in Rojava and contestation around these. By some accounts – including a document that basically forms the Constitution of Rojava[6] – there are two types of systems/structures in place based on what seem to be diverging ideas that are running concurrently. One structure is a type of representative parliament with something akin to a cabinet; the other being democratic confederalism of a sort based on assemblies, councils and communes. There does also appear to be the possibility of tension arising between these two types of systems going forward too, if Rojava survives.

So there is a faction in Rojava politics, including in the leadership of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), that want what amounts to a state structure – rather than the more radical PKK vision. In practice they are trying to implement representative democracy based on a parliament, with basic human rights, where an executive will have quite a lot of power, but tactically they can't call it a state as it appears the idea of democratic confederalism is widely held as an ideal amongst many Kurds.

[6] http://civiroglu.net/the-constitution-of-the-rojava-cantons/

As reported by the Kurdish Anarchist Forum (KAF) a group of pacifistic Kurdish anarchists in exile, as the Arab Spring took hold of Syria there was the development of a directly democratic grassroots movement created by everyday workers and people in Rojava called the Movement of the Democratic Society (Tev-Dem). It was this movement that with pushed for the implementation of "its plans and programs without further delay before the situation became worse."[2] This program was very extensive and it is worth quoting the KAF report at length:

"The Tev-Dem's programme was very inclusive and covered every single issue in society. Many people from the rank and file and from different backgrounds, including Kurdish, Arab, Muslim, Christian, Assyrian and Yazidis, have been involved. The first task was to establish a variety of groups, committees and communes on the streets in neighborhoods, villages, counties and small and big towns everywhere. The role of these groups was to become involved in all the issues facing society. Groups were set up to look at a number of issues including: women's, economic, environmental, education and health and care issues, support and solidarity, centers for the family martyrs, trade and business, diplomatic relations with foreign countries and many more. There are even groups established to reconcile disputes among different people or factions to try to avoid these disputes going to court unless these groups are incapable of resolving them.

These groups usually have their own meeting every week to talk about the problems people face where they live. They have their own representative in the main group in the villages or towns called the 'House of the People'.

They believed that the revolution must start from the bottom of society and not from the top. It must be a social, cul-

www.demokrathaber.net/dunya/salih-muslim-kobanid…html

[2] The experiment of West Kurdistan (Syrian Kurdistan) has proved that people can make changes. http://www.anarkismo.net/article/27301

tural and educational as well as political revolution. It must be against the state, power and authority. It must be people in the communities who have the final decision-making responsibilities. These are the four principles of the Movement of the Democracy Society (Tev-Dem)."

In other eras and places such a movement of democratic assemblies and committees at the base of society open to the people have been known collectively as workers' councils. If these developments are true the Tev-Dem was quite the achievement.

However such reports have included accounts of the creation of a constituent assembly like parliamentary legislative body called the Democratic Self-Rule Administration. As New Compass a Bookchinite publishing collective has reported:

"While in many areas the Kurdish population already has decades of experience with the Kurdish movement's concepts of women's liberation and social freedom, here too there are of course also divergences. Some wish to organize in classical parties rather than in councils.

This problem has been solved in Rojava through a dual structure. On one hand a parliament is chosen, to which free elections under international supervision are to take place as soon as possible. This parliament forms a parallel structure to the councils; it forms a transitional government, in which all political and social groups are represented, while the council system forms a kind of parallel parliament. The structuring and rules of this collaboration are at the moment under discussion."[3]

This among other questions lay bare the reality of the political situation in Rojava. It is unclear if the establishment of such a social democratic apparatus is a push by certain elements, or if this is part and parcel of Kurdish democratic confederalism. With anarchists the world over looking towards these

[3] Democratic Autonomy in Rojava http://new-compass.net/articles/revolution-rojava

gressive, and is surely an important fight that any anarchist can support.

This does not mean blank cheque endorsement of the PKK; it simply means that even if the PKK etc. were ethno-nationalist, but were fighting for an end to national oppression, anarchists should and could still support that fight – critically, of course – simply because the Kurds are oppressed as a people, and anarchists oppose all forms of oppression. To the extent the PKK has come closer to anarchism, the grounds for critically supporting it are further expanded.

In fact, while we do not think that anarchists should set conditions for their support for popular struggles for national liberation, it should also be noted that the PKK have, in addition to their rejection of nationalism, also rejected the state – clearly stating that "the nation-state can never be a solution"[5] – and see women's liberation as being irrevocably tied to the abolition of the state.

These dimensions completely disappear in "K.B.'s" article: the PKK emerges as villains as sinister as any other regime; it is almost as if Kurdish "ethno-nationalism" is an invention, rather than a response – problematic as it is – to Kurdish oppression. And to make the case further, the author then discovers in the PKK only ills, and nothing worthy of support.

CRITICAL (NOT BLIND) SUPPORT

None of this means blindly supporting the PKK. We disagree with the purism of the "K.B." article, but we do not go to the opposite extreme, liquidating our politics. We would agree that anarchists should not liquidate our politics behind any non-anarchist force – becoming cheerleaders and blind supporters, or silencing our criticisms or closing down our independent activities. However, whereas "K.B." seeks to do this by isolating

[5] http://www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys=article&artID=204

At another level, the methodology also reveals itself: if something is not purely anarchist, it is deemed beyond support. The problem is that most major movements today are not anarchist, or purely anarchist. To say anarchists can never work with other currents – nationalists, Marxist-Leninists, liberals etc. – simply means saying that anarchists will not engage with anyone at all, besides other anarchists.

But since most people are not – whether we wish it or not – anarchists, this means the anarchists will isolate themselves, and do so proudly. This does not solve, but instead, compounds, the isolation of the anarchists. It cuts off audiences and potential anarchist influence.

ALIGNMENTS IN CONCRETE BATTLES

A third problem is that of taking sides in key battles. Not every battle requires anarchists to take sides, but some do.

Whatever the limitations of the forces that led the anti-apartheid struggle, for example, they were progressive compared to the apartheid regime; they were movements fighting against a monstrously oppressive system and, for all their limits, were in this sense infinitely preferable to that system. In such fights, anarchists surely cannot remain neutral, as if there was no difference at all between oppositional popular forces, like trade unions and community movements, and the apartheid regime. To have suggested otherwise would betray a serious loss of perspective.

Likewise, consider the situation of the PKK and allied structures: from the start, in all of its incarnations, the PKK has fought against the severe national oppression of the Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Kurds from the popular classes are oppressed as workers and peasants, but as Kurds they face additional oppression. The fight against that oppression is pro-

developments as some libertarian light in the region, the question of the State and what form of governance is being established should continue to be watched closely. Historically the libertarian socialist program though has been for the development of genuine workers' councils and committees like those originally set up by the Tev-Dem, and there have been bitter fights against the establishment of parliamentary democratic state projects, with free votes, where participation is atomized, and power really held by executive powers above the people.

If there is one great hope for libertarian openings in the region it is the existence of the women's movements. Kurdish society like world society as a whole has historically been a deeply patriarchal society to the point that Öcalan from his own admission in 1992 is probably a rapist, with is especially worrying with the personality cult developed around him.[4] Though still tied to his teachings Kurdish women out of their own experience through the last few decades started to organize themselves autonomously. Groups like the Kurdish Free Women's Movement (KJB) and the Free Women's Units Star (YJA Star) call for world wide solidarity between women's movements against the patriarchal nation-state. As Dilar Dirik an activist close to YJA Star describes in her talk on forming a

[4] In a book written by Öcalan in 1992 titled Cozumleme, Talimat ve Perspektifler (Analyses, Orders and Perspectives), he stated: "These girls mentioned. I don't know, I have relations with thousands of them. I don't care how anyone understands it. If I've gotten close with some of them, how should this have been? (…) On these subjects, they leave aside all the real measurements and find someone and gossip, say 'this was attempted to be done to me here' or 'this was done to me there'! These shameless women both want to give too much and then develop such things. Some of the people mentioned. Good grace! They say 'we need it so, it would be very good' and then this gossip is developed (…) I'm saying it openly again. This is the sort of warrior I am. I love girls a lot, I value them a lot. I love all of them. I try to turn every girl into a lover, in an unbelievable level, to the point of passion. I try to shape them from their physique to their soul, to their thoughts. I see it in myself to fulfill this task. I define myself openly. If you find me dangerous, don't get close!"

"Stateless State" as seen in a widely circulated video, the Kurdish women's movement through the experience of patriarchy in the Kurdish national liberation movement and Kurdish society at large has come to the conclusion that forming a new nation state should no longer be part of the Kurdish liberation project, as the nation state is an inherently patriarchal institution. However, though many anarchists would agree with this analysis and are surely nodding our heads in agreement, Dirik makes clear that the movement is not at the moment in favor of the general abolition of the State, but organizing democratic autonomy inspite of the State. As anarcho-syndicalists it is our duty and not a criticism to point out that the Syrian state, as well as the rest of the nation states encircling Rojava and which in the rest of Kurdistan exists will not merely disappear with the development of their project for regional democratic autonomy. The State must be actively fought and smashed, by the masses within every nation and it is the historical mission for all revolutionary internationalist liberatory forces.

In conclusion, the development of the social democratic representative democracy, the patriarchal and ethnic nationalist past of the PKK (PYD Saleh Muslim leader has hinted at needing a war to expel Arabs down the line[5]), the PYD's cooperation with and truce with the FSA and Islamists[6], the draft since July[7], the different elements seeking US/international community support are reason enough to be hesitant to put too much emphasis on the official leadership. The bright spots where they exist are with the resistance and self-activity of the

[5] PYD Leader Warns of War with Arab Settlers in Kurdish Areas http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/24112013

[6] Details about the development of an alliance between the PYD and the FSA and Islamist forces including a split from Syrian Al Queda. https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/564212-fsa-…kurds http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/index.php?haberID=118383&ha…=nuce

[7] Conscription begins in the Kurdish region of Syria, evasion elsewhere http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23519

People and organisations change politically and it is irrelevant what they were: it is what they say now and what they do now that matters. The PKK has also changed in many ways; this too is part of its past. The PKK has critiqued its past, trying to change its politics, and in these critiques[4] they are sometimes brutally honest about their own past flaws. This is very promising and shows political maturity.

How many movements – including anarchist ones – honestly reflect on what is or has been wrong with them and use this to improve? So, while the PKK were not perfect, and still are not, they have reflected and changed – it will not do to show they were Marxist-Leninist thirty years ago, as if nothing has changed.

DIFFERENCES IN METHOD BETWEEN THE TWO LINES

It is in invoking a demand for a new, autonomous, women's movement in Rojava that "K.B." reveals an important part of her or his methodology. Situations are not engaged as they are; they are engaged by what the militant would like them to be, which usually means a fairly abstract schema of demands and programmes. Thus, regardless of the actual PKK record, regardless of the context, regardless even of what the women in the PKK and in Rojava do, there is an answer ready-made: form movement type X. This does not deal with the complex realities, and makes it very hard to grapple with this reality, when all answers exist before any grappling takes place.

[4] http://www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys=articles See especially the articles on "Democratic Modernity: Era of Woman's Revolution"; "Killing the dominant male"; "Capitalism and Women"; "Women's situation in the Kurdish society"; "The Nation-State Can Never Be a Solution"; "Briefly On Socialism"; 'The Kurdistan Woman's Liberation Movement'; and of course "Democratic Confereralism"

SIDESTEPPING SOME FACTS

The author "K.B." also wishes to present the PKK as somehow a "patriarchal" (that is, male-dominated) movement. The main evidence given is the prominent role of men in leadership positions. But there is more to a movement's position on women's liberation than a head count. Despite operating in a context in which the subordination of women is actively promoted by many forces – not least the Islamic State/ISIS – the PKK has nonetheless actively promoted equality for women in its armed forces, structure and ideology. Invoking the demand for women's liberation in Rojava to be carried out by some sort of "autonomous" women's movement is abstract, since such a movement does not exist; it is also misleading, in that to the extent that any force is fighting for women's liberation in Rojava, it is the PKK.

The PKK pioneered the movement for women's liberation in Kurdistan, and it is a fact that those areas where the PKK does not have a major presence are very patriarchal, whereas those where the PKK has a presence are not. This is not a coincidence. It is because the PKK sees the domination of women as closely linked to other forms of exploitation and oppression and believes that the struggle against women's oppression, therefore, must be at the heart of any progressive struggle – in this case for the liberation of the Kurds and, ultimately, of the popular classes of the Middle East.

"K.B." then stresses that the PKK were originally Marxist-Leninist, or at least influenced by this approach in the 1970s and 1980s. That may indeed be the case, but one question to be asked is whether that is currently the case. The Zapatistas, too, came from a Maoist approach; Mikhail Bakunin himself was originally a Slavic nationalist. The past is not always a good guide to the present, especially when other aspects of the past are ignored.

masses and the women's movement. Social processes of transformation are complicated and often rife with internal conflicts and dynamics. The political program put forward might be decentralist with strong potentialities towards social democracy rather than anti-statist and social revolutionary. There is also still much research to be done about industrial and agricultural economy and organization. That shouldn't hold anarcho-syndicalists back from defending the self defense of the everyday masses and their own organizations of struggle in Rojava against ISIS, local states and western imperialism, but we should be careful not to jump to cheerleading for the official representation of the Kurdish movement through it's traditionally statist parties like PKK and PYD.

Long live the struggle of the toiling masses and free women!

With the oppressed against the oppressors, always!

K.B.

- See more at: http://ideasandaction.info/2014/10/rojava-anarcho-syndi…dpuf

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An Anarchist Communist Reply to 'Rojava: An Anarcho-Syndicalist Perspective'

by Anarkismo.net Editorial Group

This text is a response to the article Rojava: An Anarcho-Syndicalist Perspective by K. B., recently published on the Ideas and Action website of the North America-based Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA). In the article, there is an attack on the Rojava revolution in the Middle East, an event in which the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has played a key role. This response is not published in bad faith or with ill intentions towards the writer or their organisation but, rather, in order to clarify and share our thinking regards the question of anarchist support both for national liberation movements and what is, for us, a very important and inspiring struggle playing out in the Middle East. The aim is to have a frank, and comradely, debate that takes us all forward.

CONTEXT FOR CRITICAL SUPPORT

The PKK and its projects have attracted attention not just for the Rojava revolution – where a substantial part of the PKK programme is being implemented. The PKK has also attracted world attention for its heroic battle against the murder-

author is extremely sceptical of the credentials of the PKK, he or she is far more credulous whenever the evidence paints the PKK in a poor light. The most notable example is the assertion that Öcalan is a "rapist." A closer examination of the sources used reveals only links to a Turkish ultra-nationalist website hostile to the PKK – and a book attacking Öcalan. Yet even the author of this book provides no evidence except what he admits are "rumours" without confirmation.

This is a fairly unfortunate way of arguing – scouring the internet for unfounded and defamatory claims by dubious sources, and accepting these uncritically. On other points, too, the writer "K.B." makes statements that have no factual basis. The PKK and its allied structures are presented as narrowly "ethno-nationalist." Nationalism is an ideology aiming at multi-class unity and class society: in its Marxist and now its democratic confederalist phases, the PKK never really fitted this mould.

If "ethno-nationalist" is taken to mean the PKK is narrowly, exclusively, Kurdish, this too will not wash with what is taking place in Rojava. Rojava is not only about the liberation of Kurds: "K.B." even quotes a statement by the Kurdish Anarchist Forum (KAF), in the article itself, which points to a more complex picture. The KAF states clearly that the Movement of the Democratic Society (Tev-Dem) in Rojava has the involvement of many people "from different backgrounds, including Kurdish, Arab, Muslim, Christian, Assyrian and Yazidis"[2].

So, this is by no means the narrow, even xenophobic, PKK that "K.B." wishes to expose – but in fact misrepresents. On the contrary, however, Öcalan and other PKK militants[3] present democratic confederalism as part of the liberation of all peoples of the Middle East – not just the Kurds – and have come to reject nationalism itself strongly.

[2] http://www.anarkismo.net/article/27301

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRsw5s28jxY

anarchists should engage with movements that are, if not completely anarchist, at least in some ways closer to our goals.

Politics is a messy situation, based on debate, conflict and compromise. It is not about waiting for perfect movements and perfect moments, but about trying to navigate – again, without liquidating our politics – a more complicated reality, marked by partial gains and messy struggles.

THE ARGUMENT REPUDIATING SUPPORT

By contrast the article in Ideas and Action takes another stance. It portrays the PKK in the worst possible light, as "authoritarian," "patriarchal" and "ethno-nationalist," and goes to the extent of raising several serious charges against Öcalan. The political conclusions drawn by the author "K.B." are clear: anarchists should distance themselves from the Rojava revolution and the PKK.

So, this is partly a judgement that the PKK and its project is neither against oppression, nor in any sense compatible with anarchist goals. But it tends to follow a larger line of reasoning in a sector of the anarchist movement that routinely dismisses everything that is not purely anarchist – and in practice, confines itself only to engaging with other anarchists. If this approach is correct in pointing to the dangers of uncritically supporting non-anarchist movements, it responds in such a manner that it cuts itself from engaging any movement, and taking any really concrete position on most immediate struggles – in favour of general slogans and appeals that have not much concrete application.

USE OF EVIDENCE

Regrettably, many of the claims made by "K.B." do not derive from a balanced engagement with the evidence. While the

ous ultra-rightwing forces of the "Islamic State"/ISIS, particularly in battles in Syria.

The PKK originally stood for an independent Marxist state for the Kurdish people, to be created through means like armed struggle. Over the last 10 years, however, the PKK has significantly shifted from this project, explicitly adopting core elements of "democratic confederalism" – an approach derived from the late, anarchist-influenced, writer Murray Bookchin. In 2005, the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan said:

> The democratic confederalism of Kurdistan is not a State system, it is the democratic system of a people without a State… It takes its power from the people and adopts to reach self sufficiency in every field including economy.[1]

The issue of the relation of anarchists and syndicalists to movements like the PKK – movements that are not explicitly, or even thoroughly, anarchist – is a matter of controversy. A substantial section of the anarchist movement, particularly the large platformist and especifista network around Anarkismo.net, has supported the PKK, although not uncritically.

LOGIC OF SUPPORT

In summary of our general orientation, we support struggles against oppression in principle, and this includes struggles against national and racial oppression.

Concretely, this means taking a side with people in struggle against oppression, and defending their right to choose approaches we might not agree with. In the case of national liberation struggles, this means we defend the right of colonised peoples to resist and overcome imperialist repression of projects

[1] http://www.freemedialibrary.com/index.php/Declara-

of liberation by means of political-economic forms, such as independent liberal democratic or state-socialist statehood, that we see will ultimately fail to fully emancipate proletarians and peasants. This is an issue of principle: opposing oppression, and taking sides with the oppressed. Therefore we do not take a "purist" position that seems to be neutral, but that in practice equates oppressed and oppressor as equal evils.

This should not, however, be misunderstood to mean a blanket endorsement of every position or action or current taken in such struggles; we do not accept the position that refuses to make any criticisms, or take any independent position, on the basis that only "the oppressed" can decide, or on the grounds that "solidarity" demands silence. Obviously only the oppressed can decide, but the oppressed are not politically or socially homogenous, and all struggles are internally contested and imperfect. Solidarity is about comradely assistance; it is not about closing dialogue or excusing errors.

In concrete terms, we do not support every organised current in struggles against oppression. The closer an organised current is to our positions, the more we support them and show solidarity; and at the same time, there are some political positions that are simply unacceptable. In terms of strategy and tactics, there is a sliding scale, and this means we prioritise, in practice, relations with some groups over others, and deliberately do not establish any relations at all with others.

Further, while showing solidarity, and providing concrete assistance, we do not "liquidate" our politics or our project, becoming uncritical supporters, or donor organisations. Our aim is, simply, to align with struggles against oppression, while also aiming to influence those struggles. Only anarchist-communism offers the conditions for a reconstruction of human societies that will enable a complete resolution of various social evils, including various types of oppression.

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Therefore, in our solidarity, we also engage in politics as an independent force that seeks some influence. Engagement is an issue of strategy; its precise forms depend on context and are therefore issues of tactics. But centrally, in our engagement, we retain our political independence and critique, and do not abandon our principle (strategy and tactics). Concretely, there are some practical issues around which we can cooperate directly with specific organised currents and offer solidarity (even if only at the level of raising awareness); then there are various struggles within the struggles of the oppressed, in which we can take sides; but we aim at all times to propose, and win influence for, our methods, aims and projects.

We will summarise the concrete applications of this approach to the specific case of Rojava in the conclusion, but for now, briefly: in the fight against the Islamic State/ ISIS, and against the national oppression of the Kurds, the Anarkismo.net network aligns itself with fighters against these forces. Secondly, the PKK's partial embrace of anarchism lends additional grounds for support: for all its limitations, the PKK project is one that in some respects aligns with anarchist ideals. It is far from a top-down authoritarian regime in the making, in the mould of, for example, Mao's Red Army. In this respect, critical support for the PKK is similar to the critical support many anarchists have for the Zapatistas (EZLN) in Mexico. The issue is not whether the PKK is 100% anarchist – it is certainly not – but rather, whether the PKK is fighting on the right side, and secondly, whether there are elements of the PKK programme that anarchists can gladly support.

In short, this approach to support and solidarity – and even alliances – does not proceed from the position that anarchists can only ever engage with forces that are purely, unambiguously anarchist. Rather, the logic is that anarchists stand with the oppressed against the oppressors – without renouncing their differences with other currents. And the logic is also that