

The role of internationalists in the Rojava revolution

Internationalist Commune

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A total revolution of all kinds of relationships existing in society has been going on in Rojava for 6 years now, but it is far from being completed – if such a thing as completion is even possible. It is on the contrary at its very beginning. It has to be defended against its enemies, deepened and continuously developed further.

Therefore, internationalists who come to Rojava do not come as tourists to look at a finished work. Rojava is not a museum where the revolution can be examined and measured. Rojava is not a monument of past battles. Rojava is a living and developing organism. And those who approach it as revolutionaries become part of it.

We internationalists in this revolution, which is still in its infancy, came from various countries and different political traditions. Most of us share the idea that we came to gain experience which will also be useful for work in the groups and structures of our home countries.

Therefore, direct involvement in the different branches of civil work of the revolution is an important part of the education made possible by the Internationalist Commune: In womens' and youth structures, in communes and cooperatives. After the basic education which includes ideology and language we set off to work in society.

Learn to live with contradictions

“Coming from Europe, where revolution can be treated in a rather theoretical manner and the perspective on Rojava likewise remains a theoretical one, I was at first surprised at how many difficulties, compromises and problems I encountered in this revolution,” says Heval Baran from Germany, who came to Kurdistan about a year ago.

“You cannot develop a system for a free society without contradictions by sitting on your desk or having abstract theoretical discussions and then put it into practice just like that. Revolution is a process in which you encounter contradictions all the time. Enduring these contradictions and resolving them step by step without losing the revolutionary perspective – that’s something people can learn in Rojava.”

The reason for the contradictions within the construction of a new society in Rojava is not just the fact that we are in a war zone. The influence of capitalism does not only show itself in the form of fighter jets or tanks.

“One of capitalist modernity’s ways to influence the youth are the computer games. In Hileli alone there are four so-called *counters* where the youth go after school to play Counterstrike until the evening,” says the Italian internationalist Serhildan about the time he spent working with the youth in Hileli, a neighborhood in the outskirts of Qamislo.

“As a consequence of this excessive gaming they occupy themselves less with the reality they live in. They become passive. Their identity is defined by playing computer games and the counters become the center of their social relations.”

Superficial and sexist conceptions of beauty are found among the youth as well as the use of alcohol and drugs as an attempt to escape a reality perceived as depressive.

“The cruelties of the war waged by Daesh have a big destructive impact on young people without a strong ideological consciousness. After traumatising experiences the youth turn to alcohol in search of distraction and suppression, although drinking is accepted neither by traditional society nor by the political movement,” he explains. “Apart from the military attacks commit-

ted by Daesh, the Syrian regime and the fascist Turkish state there also are attacks of capitalist mentality, targeting the youth in particular with the aim of weakening the revolution.”

The complexity of the revolution stretches out into all areas of society: patriarchal family structures need to be overcome, and feudal clan structures must be transformed without causing open enmity towards the new society. Economic supply has to be guaranteed even under the most difficult conditions.

The revolution is a struggle which is not only fought militarily. Organising is the key to success. “This makes the works of the revolutionaries in Rojava even more important,” says Serhildan.

“The youth is given possibilities for education and the development of a revolutionary youth culture and identity is supported. This work requires daily involvement with the youth, in their families, in the counters and in youth centers. It requires daily discussions about the desires and goals of the youth and organising within the existing revolutionary structures.”

Constructing the self-administration

Cemile from France tells us about those who fight this fight relentlessly. She started her first works in Kobane with the Rojava Youth Union (YCR).

“The aim of our works in Kobane was to motivate the youth to take part in the revolutionary work and participate in all social structures and thus free them from their passive role in the capitalist system,” she says.

“The revolution here in Rojava is led by the autonomous women’s and youth structures. The youth is still creative and open for change. They have no fear of going new ways and participate with a lot of energy and enthusiasm in all kinds of works. This creates an enormous social strength. The numerous young teachers finally have the possibility to teach their mother tongue and to research. They understand the importance of independent education and pass on their knowledge.”

The work among the youth aims at the construction of structures of democratic self-administration. “A big goal of our works was to give the youth a voice by bringing them closer to the practice of self-administration. This involved building youth councils, student organisations and making assemblies so they can collect their opinions and suggestions, talk about them and strengthen them.”

For Cemile as well as for dozens of other internationalists in the civil works these experiences are pointing the way ahead for their work in Europe: “All in all this time was very beautiful and educational,” she says. “What is special here, as opposed to living and working in Europe, is the openness of society towards critics, discussions and support.

“You just approach the people and by establishing and understanding of each other you solve problems or prevent them from coming into existence in the first place. Many things and processes are still complicated and far from perfect but there is a rapid development of mentality and methods of organising society as well as a development of the economical situation and the educational system. Those developments and methods leave me without doubt, that the revolution will continue advancing despite all the hostile influences from the exterior – like those of the Turkish state as well as those of capitalist ideology in general – and will keep pointing the way ahead for revolutionary work all over the world.”

Dialectic of perspectives

Work in society is also a site where different points of view encounter one another. “My internationalist perspective was something important that I could pass on to the youth,” says Cemile. “The importance of the progress here for revolutionary processes everywhere, their function as a role model for others, the connection between different fights which I consider necessary for a worldwide revolutionary change.”

While contributing the experiences of other left movements to the local struggles the internationalists at the same time change their own patterns of thought and perception. They can learn how to actually work outside of their own scene or subculture among the population. They learn how much patience this requires, but also not to present themselves as a missionary and rather as a human among humans.

“From the point of view of a radical left which rather distances itself from society instead of trying to organise it, working with society was a very important experience,” says Baran from Germany. “Visiting the families plays an important role in these works – the families who already support the revolution, as well as those who are closer to KDP or the Syrian regime. Back in Germany, political work always consisted of writing calls for action, organising protest marches, sitting in meetings and other similar activities. During my time in Derik I experienced how important it can be to visit a family and have dinner with them.”

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