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# Tekmîl

## Creating a Culture of Constructive Criticism

Philip Argeş O’Keeffe

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In the existing societal structures dictated by capitalist modernity, it is very rare that we find means by which we can facilitate open and honest discussions. Whether it’s in the workplace, in schools, even between friends and families, we are restricted by social constructs which inhibit our ability to express our perspectives, hear those of others and engage in meaningful, constructive discussions.

The concept of constructive criticism is incredibly challenging for so many people. Many people struggle with receiving criticism. Perhaps this is due to the narcissism and egoism which is encouraged by the competitive and individualistic nature of capitalist society. However, personally, I find that the most difficult part of constructive criticism is the act of giving criticism. The fear of conflict or rejection can be paralytic. The big question that arises is that of why does criticism evoke fear?

Perhaps the issue is that we do not have a culture of constructive criticism. Capitalist modernity does not foster equality nor mutual trust. It divides us and forces a upon us a hyper competitive culture built upon internal and external deception and facades. In this

system, criticism is not seen as a means by which we can improve ourselves and each other but rather as a means by which we can attack and destroy our competition, our enemies, our fellow humans.

It can be difficult to imagine that an alternative exists. For many people, the capitalist system can appear so overwhelming and oppressive that effecting change can appear impossible. The degree of competition and mistrust is so great that people might often think that by allowing themselves to trust their fellow humans would merely make them vulnerable to imminent attack. Personally, before I came to Rojava I held these very same suspicions.

Upon arriving in Rojava, some of the first of many revolutionary concepts that I was introduced to were those of *Hevaltî* and *Tekmîl*.

*Tekmîl* roughly translates to “report”. On its face it sounds fairly mundane, however a more conceptual definition would be that of revolutionary constructive criticism. *Tekmîl* typically follow up everything such as military operations, training sessions, civil projects, or simple daily tasks. These sessions can be called at any time by anyone in either the civil or military structures in Rojava.

The structure of *Tekmîl* is based on giving and receiving critiques and self-critiques. The process is based on the foundations of *Hevaltî*. *Hevaltî* roughly translates to friendship or comradeship. It is the idea that we work together, we help each other, we share everything from the tangible to the intangible not because we expect something in return but simply because we are comrades, that we are humans living, struggling and experiencing life together, that we are sharing the same purpose of trying to advance the collective wellbeing. It is the idea that we can trust and believe in each other and that we need not fear ulterior intention.

By establishing the culture of *Hevaltî* as the basis of revolutionary life we create the alternative environment and society conducive to constructive criticism and the means by which, together, we improve ourselves and the collective. This is critical to *Tekmîl* because it allows us to respectfully give criticisms and more im-

portantly, accept, absorb and address the criticisms in an efficient manner, free of ego, fear, mistrust or conflict.

In order to prevent digressions or polemics, the *Tekmîl* format suggests that each participant has the opportunity to give critiques and self-critiques without any response from any of the other participants. It is also suggested that the same critique of a participant should avoid being repeated during the *Tekmîl* once it has already been given, the idea being aimed at avoiding the perception of a participant being singled out and attacked by the group. This format fosters a more efficient, disciplined and professional means by which each participant can contribute. Furthermore, it alleviates the fear of conflict that so often can prevent a person from expressing themselves. Finally, *Tekmîl* will close with the opportunity for each of the participants to make suggestions for anything from improvements, projects, etc.

The idea of *Tekmîl* not only creates a safe environment for constructive criticism and allows us to work together to improve ourselves and each other but it also acts as a means by which we can encourage accountability and prevent stagnation. It is rooted in the aspect of the philosophy of democratic confederalism which emphasizes humility, open-mindedness and progress in all aspects of revolutionary life.