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Anarchist Critique of The PKK

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and over look the role they play for US strategy in the region. Dismissing criticisms of this role only serves to further solidify the anti-criticism force field of cheer leaders. It is often stated that the “support” cheer leaders offer ultimately does not matter because said cheer leaders are thousands of miles away from the conflict. I have come to disagree with this argument. Declarations of support for anything, by anyone, always have the potential for ideological influence among others and by nature quantify one’s own ideological position. Ideological positions ultimately lead to actions, big or small. This leads me to the conclusion that western support of the PKK does matter in the sense that it is propagating a problematic ideological point of view. Thus part of the job for western Anarchists is to challenge the cheer leading squad. Get cheer leaders to re-evaluate their conclusions and try to bring them around to a more nuanced and informed point of view. This will no doubt be a difficult task. As I stated earlier, any challenge of the cheer leading squad usually and inevitably results in some kind of blow back, many cheer leaders will not be so keen on rethinking their views on the subject. However, our job as revolutionaries has always been to challenge things and deal with the blow back, we can’t stop now. I will not offer any statements about what Anarchists and revolutionaries in the region should do, I firmly believe I am in no place to do so, however I do think that whatever they do should be guided by principles of REAL libertarian socialism. We don’t need “democratic civilization” or “democratic autonomy.” We need liberation, and social revolution. This goes for the Kurdish population as well as all life on this planet.

“In the past week, more than 6,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Turkey after witnessing the fierce clashes in Tal Abyad between ISIS and the Kurds. One refugee told McClatchy that YPG fighters evicted Arabs and Turkmens from their homes and burned their personal documents. “They forced us from our village and said to us ‘This is Rojava,’” he claimed. Rojava is the name that the PYD uses for the territory it claims for itself in north-east Syria.”²

Ultimately the evidence is stacked against the PYD/YPG. I was at some points a lot more confident in the accusations of ethnic cleansing, however after looking over many different articles and seeing the scant amount of information available it’s hard for me to really make that accusation myself. However, I do think the insufficient responses from the PYD as well as the fact that these accusations are corroborated by multiple outside and on the ground sources should get cheerleaders thinking, especially since the PYD has been known to carry out disappearances and arbitrary arrests/detentions. Can you really dismiss these allegations so easily like I have seen multiple cheerleaders attempt to do? Or is this something you might have to think about?

Conclusion

Obviously I don’t agree with the cheer leaders. In my opinion the statements of solidarity, support, and hope should be directed at the rank and file struggle that has made the resistance in Kobane. It is the actions of these people alone that has created such a resistance. Groups such as the PKK, HDP, and PYD only serve to control this resistance from the outside and receive the benefit of western support from it. Bodies such as the YPG and YPJ also have to be called into question for their role in US anti-ISIS campaigns. Many are quick to celebrate these units’ heroic stand against ISIS

² Abdulrahman al-Masri, *Is there ‘systematic ethnic cleansing’ by Kurds in north-east Syria?*. web.archive.org

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1500 Arab villages liberated and people in them live in peace now. If it was true, why are these 1500 villages still standing?

These statements provide little to no insight on the situation and certainly make it seem as if the PYD official is withholding information. A report from Amnesty International's Lama Fakih said this:

By deliberately demolishing civilian homes, in some cases razing and burning entire villages, displacing their inhabitants with no justifiable military grounds, the autonomous administration is abusing its authority and brazenly flouting international humanitarian law, in attacks that amount to war crimes,

In its fight against IS, the autonomous administration appears to be trampling all over the rights of civilians who are caught in the middle. We saw extensive displacement and destruction that did not occur as a result of fighting. This report uncovers clear evidence of a deliberate, co-ordinated campaign of collective punishment of civilians in villages previously captured by IS, or where a small minority were suspected of supporting the group.

One researcher claimed that "ethnic cleansing" was the result of the YPG targeting Sunni Arab youth who were thought to have joined ISIS. People involved with the PKK and western cheer leaders have claimed that what actually happened was the YPG/PYD evacuating civilians out of war zone. However, these statements as I have shown above are contradicted by both the aforementioned researcher from the Syrian Network for Human Rights and the above quoted Amnesty International report. It is also contradicted by this statement from a refugee fleeing from intense fighting between ISIS and the YPG:

prison. Many in the party refer to the PKK's new social democratic ideology as "the ideology of Ocalan." As far as I know there is no opposition in the party at all, much less one willing to meaningfully challenge Ocalan's ideological stranglehold.

A movement capable of really accomplishing liberation needs to be allowed ideological and organizational breathing room. Even in the beginning there needs to be many debates among members about the platform of the movement. As the movement grows this need does not diminish, in fact the need for internal debate, especially on key issues, only grows as now mass debates are becoming needed rather than small debates among a certain group of people. This is because for liberation to occur it needs to be the work of the oppressed themselves. The oppressed need to be able to have an open dialogue with each other in order to coordinate a movement and this only matters more as the movement grows.

Ethnic Cleansing

Accusations of ethnic cleansing against Arabs and Turkmen have been made by Amnesty International, multiple reports against the PYD, and other rebel groups such as the FSA. It seems to be pretty hard to place these accusations and get right down to the truth or untruth of them. Of course the YPG and the PYD have denied the allegations with one PYD official making the argument that many of the Kurdish forces' fighters are Arab and was also quoted as saying this:

Now, let me be clear; we have liberated some 1500 Arab villages,

Some of these villages became war zones between us and ISIS. Battles took days in some villages. I am not saying there has been no harm to those villages. But they are not more than four or five villages. We have

If you consider yourself to be on the radical left side of politics, be it Marxist, Anarchist, what have you, you have probably been bombarded for the last year with talk about things like "The PKK" and "The YPG," or "The YPJ." These are all part of the Syrian Kurdish movement that has come to power in a few cantons in the middle east, the canton mentioned the most easily being the region of Kobane which has been a front for the Kurdish fighters against the forces of Islamic State. The reaction the broad left has given this movement is one of intense support. Any statements critical of the movement are immediately attacked. Afed put out an article in December 2014 heavily criticizing the movement which is now taken down. I don't know why it was, but I think I am not very far off in guessing that people's response to that article had something to do with it. Articles entitled "DEAR MR. ANARCHIST, YOU AREN'T LISTENING" and "Mr. Anarchist, We need to have a chat about colonialism" came out denouncing all those critical of the Syrian Kurdish movement as those who held positions that furthered colonialism. At the same time, telling any supporters that you are critical of the Syrian Kurdish movement often provokes outright attack or confused "why"s on the part of said supporters. I have written critically about this movement before, none of the original articles are up on my site anymore, however this is not because I was bullied into submission by accusations of helping colonialism. Rather, I felt I could do a more rigorous and more well thought out critique. This will be my official piece on the subject, dealing with it at length, and taking a critical look at it, while responding to supporters' counter arguments against nay sayers.

Ideology

The story of the PKK really begins with a young student Abdullah Ocalan who had come to Turkey for study purposes. Turkey has a storied history of left wing movements forming, usually engaging

in violent conflicts with state power and then being put down by or absorbed into the state itself. As a young man Ocalan found himself absorbed in this world of left-wing activism. Ocalan being of Kurdish decent could not help but notice how the traditional Turkish radical left had neglected “the Kurdish question.” In Turkey as in much of the middle east Kurdish people are severely repressed. In Turkey it is illegal to speak the Kurdish language and the Kurdish alphabet has also been outlawed. Turkey does not even see it’s Kurdish population as Kurdish, rather, as Turkish. It is effectively illegal to be a Kurd in Turkey. The radical left milieu in Turkey at this time dismissed this. Their nationalist ideology had lead them to the conclusion that Turkey was an oppressed nation and thus could not nationally oppress other nations. This lead Ocalan to radically break with the typical milieu and form his own group around the cause of Kurdish independence. Ocalan’s vision was one of the Kurds smashing the Turkish state and taking power forming and independent nation state of a Kurdish character. This cell would eventually be constructed into the PKK, however it had to endure quite a bit of ideological and political development before the PKK we know today would appear.

Since Turkey was created through a soviet sponsored national liberation movement much of the Turkish radical left carried a Marxist-Leninist ideology. The PKK did not escape this forming it’s own brand of Marxism-Leninism/Maoism that viewed the Kurdish struggle as the “primary contradiction” of sorts. At this point the PKK accepted the Leninist/Trotskyist notion that nationalization of production by the state which itself is controlled by the party apparatus constituted “socialism.” However the PKK always rejected the proletariat as the revolutionary subject. One member of the PKK claimed that the proletariat, where it existed in a nation populated mostly by peasants (Kurdistan) was on the side of Turkish enemy. Ocalan himself stated that he did not believe that class divisions even existed in Kurdish society and maintains that conclusion to this day. The PKK has always viewed

the state as an institution because the state is integrated into class society to the point where it directly acts on behalf of the ruling class.

Cult of Personality and “The Ideology Of Ocalan”

The thing to remember about Ocalan and the cult of personality is that Ocalan has been the main player in the PKK since it’s inception. He was the driving force behind the formation of the PKK and the main developer of it’s ideology. Other high ranking party members usually didn’t contribute to the PKK’s politics, most of what they wrote amounted to memoirs. There has never really been any ideological debate in the PKK. Even in the Bolshevik party different members always had divergent opinions on this or that issue, even after the banning of factions. The PKK is thus less comparable to the Bolshevik party and a lot more comparable to the Chinese CP during the war with the KMT and the Imperialists. Mao was the main ideological engine behind the party, the unchallenged ideological engine at that. Even the rank and file of the PKK are largely at any given time in agreement with Ocalan on all the major issues. Earlier in the piece I mentioned the mass exoduses that the PKK experienced as a result of Ocalan revising the whole PKK ideology in his court defense. These exoduses happened not only as a direct result of Ocalan contradicting an ideology he constructed, but also never injected any substantial kind of ideological debate into the party even among the rank and file since those who do not eventually go along with the shift from Leninism to democratic civilization just left.

Leading up to his capture in the late eighties Ocalan had completely consolidated full power over the party eliminating all of his competition and becoming the gate keeper of the party. This has allowed him to maintain strict ideological rule over it even from

the group suffered two mass exoduses as a result of members being alienated and disillusioned by Ocalan's statements. It appears the change from Marxism-Leninism to "democratic autonomy" was made by Ocalan needing to defend himself from state repression. I am not making the claim that Ocalan only changed world views because he wanted to get out of trouble, there was clearly a good bit of reasoning and reading that went into the change and the rank and file clearly hold ideological allegiance to him and these ideas. However, I do think it played its role, whatever that may have been.

Ocalan's views as described in his famous pamphlet entitled "Democratic Confederalism" on the Nation State is that it is to be side stepped by democratic confederation and assemblies and eventually replaced by them. What many cheerleaders never really touch on is that Ocalan's opposition to the nation state is not based on wanting to eradicate class division, and create a collectively organized society of free-producers. Instead Ocalan opposes the state because he sees it as a barrier to spiritual, national, and democratic rights. He essentially wants to get rid of the state to make way for a liberal republic based on directly democratic confederations, through I might add, social democratic tactics as mentioned before. I think there is something to be said for the fact that Ocalan views the nation state as a barrier to any form of genuine collective involvement in society and basic democratic rights. However, Ocalan's approach is clearly not one of class struggle or anything to do with socialism/communism. If anything it is a retreading of the worst parts of Murray Bookchin's politics. Bookchin turned to this populist vision of direct democracy and later democratic confederation when as a young Trotskyist the working class rebellion that Trotsky and Trotskyists had theorized would precede the second world war didn't happen and he become disillusioned with Trotskyism rejecting class struggle as a tactic and the working class as the revolutionary subject. The fact is that class struggle politics need to be part of any serious opposition to

Kurdistan's national oppression as the main issue facing Kurdish society.

In addition the PKK began to develop an idea of "the new man" similar to that of the Soviet "new man" where the Kurdish population were to cast off the old institutions and ways of living and develop new "Kurdish" ways of living. This process would supposedly turn the Kurds into the model masculine figure that indulges in nothing, has no accesses, and always fights on the side of justice.

After the PKK's war with the Turkish state came to an end and Ocalan was captured, he ditched the rhetoric about an independent Kurdish state and adopted an idea of "democratic civilization" in which the Turkish state would be forced to allow the Kurds to exist and exercise a level of self governance. He also began to adopt the politics of American Ecologist Murray Bookchin. Bookchin had undergone various changes in political orientation and ended up synthesizing his own theory after being disillusioned with Anarchism. This was dubbed by Bookchin; "libertarian municipalism." It is a populist form of politics that seeks to re-organize the social system through a mass populace movement that overcomes gender, racial, and class divisions, dismantles the state, and replaces it with democratic, non-hierarchical confederations. Part of Bookchin's strategy was to capture local governments through elections to gain political power and momentum. Ocalan barrows this from Bookchin and re-labels it as "Democratic Confederalism." The ideology of the PKK is now one focused on building this kind of populist movement while creating a political arrangement of "democratic autonomy" away from the Turkish state where different ethnicities, nationalities, and religions can coexist. The PKK was never big on class rhetoric, usually Ocalan would use the terms "petite bourgeois" to characterize the critics of the PKK and "feudal/feudalism" to describe Turkish society and its traditions. Even these two relatively arbitrarily implored terms have been watered down to categorize critics of the PKK in general.

Many cheer leaders are quick to claim to that the PKK ideology and practice is “libertarian socialist.” However, nothing could be further from the truth. When we talk about “libertarian socialism” we are referring to a form of politics that looks for workers to take power and create a socialist society themselves in negation of state apparatuses and control of movements from above. Examples of these types of politics are my own anarcho-syndicalism, libertarian-Marxism, and the general autonomist movement. The PKK not only synthesizes Bookchin’s populism with social democratic tactics and goals, but also implores authoritarian tactics and does not further worker’s self management or workers taking power. The HDP, the legal Kurdish Party, is actively winning seats in local elections, the PYD exercises authoritarian control over workers and peasants, there is an active state with police, a military, and a prison system, Ocalan has active control over the movement even while in jail, and private property and petty commodity production exist in the region unchallenged. In fact one of the PYD chairs explained that their economics permits private property, but that these private property holders could not appropriate “social property.” There is nothing libertarian or socialist about the PKK especially since the party dropped the use of socialism as an ideological pillar years ago.

Women’s Lib?

One reason so much western support has been garnered for the PKK and the Syrian Kurdish movement is because of it’s experiments in women’s liberation. In the late eighties a large portion of the Kurdish population being fed up with Turkish State repression took the streets and fought back. There was an ongoing struggle with the Turkish state killing many activists. This struggle was not connected with the PKK in any real way who were sitting in the mountains, but many participants considered themselves in soli-

but rather with the SDF, where the YPG is only one member among many. And the United States has avoided adding the YPG to any blacklists, even though any American official could (but won’t) tell you that it’s a PKK front.

—Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

I do not think supporters of the PKK can simply dismiss arguments that the PKK is benefiting from US imperialism so easily as they think they can or would like to. I think they have to study the US’s role in the situation rather than just writing off the involvement of the world’s foremost imperial power as a side effect of “real politik.”

Nation States?

Many people argue for the PKK on the basis that Ocalan’s aforementioned “democratic autonomy” and “democratic confederalism” is “anti-nation state.” My reply is that this is only a half truth.

Firstly, the PKK quite clearly has a Stalinist past where they actively looked to create a “socialist” and Kurdish nation state. I am aware that it is more than a bit counter productive to hold people and groups to anything we can find in their skeleton closet, but I do think supporters need to think about the motivations behind the change of ideology. The PKK remained something of a Stalinist or Maoist party until Ocalan was captured. The first sign of the PKK’s moving away from Stalinism was Ocalan’s defense statement in front of the court which contradicted the PKK’s whole history up until that point.

He claimed that the PKK never wanted the violent overthrow of the Turkish state for a Kurdish one and that what the PKK always really wanted was “democratic civilization” (see section on ideology). This was so contradictory with PKK ideology at the time that

real conclusion on their argument because a large part of it is not specified.

The simple fact is that this claim does not stack up to reality and ignores the systematic, Imperialist program that the US is furthering using the PKK. It's simply not true that the PKK is taking the support for "survival" as some necessity of "real politik" or any other such pretentious concepts. It's much more likely as Alex De Jong states, that the PKK is taking the support simply because they like the money and arms.¹ This is part of a larger "deal" with the PKK that the United States has carried out in which the PKK receive materiel backing from the US in exchange for serving as the main vehicle for the US's anti-jihadi policy in the region. The US does this through a group known as "The Syrian Democratic Forces" or SDF which is known in the region as being the white house's puppet organization. It is comprised of anti-jihad fighters hand picked by the US government.

The PKK, operating in Syria through a front group known as the People's Defense Units, or YPG (with an all-female version called the YPJ), has emerged as the country's most potent anti-jihadi force. Having crushed the Islamic State in Kobane in February, Tal Abyad in June, Hasakah City in July, and now in al-Houl on the Iraqi border, the Kurds and their local allies are gearing up for further offensives on jihadi strongholds near Raqqa and south of Hasakah. The White House desperately wants to support them, seeing few other ways to pressure the Islamic State in Syria.

So, in order to avoid any legal or political blowback, U.S. officials now insist that they are not at all working with the-organization-that-must-not-be-named,

¹ Alex de Jong, *Stalinist caterpillar into libertarian butterfly?: The evolving ideology of the PKK*. theanarchistlibrary.org

parity with the PKK. Women were a profound force in this revolt and as a result pushed their way into the PKK as full participants in the struggle. They were no longer content to sit by on the sidelines, supporting the men in battle, they needed to enter the struggle as equals to men. This led to the creation of a women's union that was renamed once and then disbanded and a separate women's armed force that still exists to this day in the YPJ. Many people see the YPJ and the autonomous women's spaces that have been created by the PKK as a model for women's liberation, however there are problems with this model that many of these people simply overlook. For example this form of Feminism that has been injected into the PKK is largely, like the PKK's general ideology, completely subject to Ocalan's cult of personality and control. This is even more problematic when we consider that Ocalan is male, so in effect the feminism of the PKK, YPG, and the YPJ is controlled both in practice and in ideology by and older man. Then we also have to consider the PKK's Feminism and how it relates to the family.

The PKK seeks to make it's feminism a challenge to the typical tribal family relations that exist in the region. These relations are especially oppressive toward women often involving forced marriages between young women and their third cousin twice removed. Women are seen as the delicate prizes for men that the men must nobly guard with their lives. However, the PKK's feminism does not seek the abolition of the nuclear family which is an important point. As Engels argues in "Origin of The Family" the nuclear family is a key factor in laying the foundation for the development of patriarchy and what holds patriarchal relations together historically. This means that Feminism which can actually serve to destroy the oppression of women and finally liberate them from their patriarchal entrapment would be one that seeks to destroy the nuclear family. On the contrary the PKK's feminism calls for a new family modeled in the image of the aforementioned "new man" and newly included new women.

Many western cheerleaders who argue for the PKK's model of feminism also tend to completely ignore the way the PKK views womyn and what kind of pressure this puts on the women involved. Women are now viewed by the PKK as something of a revolutionary subject which has meant that the PKK makes them responsible for being the vanguard of the movement. Women are seen as the heart, sole, and subject of the movement and expected to lead it every step of the way. This precludes women fully and actively taking part in the movement and creating their own spaces of control while also fighting against their oppression on a basis of their own by forcing them to live up to the ideological standards of the party, putting enormous pressure on women to meet the demands of the party creating a kind of patriarchal culture within it.

I do think there are major gains that womyn have won with this new feminist shift in the PKK's practice, however it was a result of womyn refusing to be sidelined and injecting themselves as actors in the movement. The supposedly benevolent and progressive PKK had nothing to do with it and continue to actively stifle it.

War With The State

Before the PKK's "libertarian" revamp in ideology it's national liberation politics caused it to be a direct enemy to the Turkish state. In the late eighties the Turkish state had cut the PKK's base of support by displacing millions of peasants that acted as their ideological support structure. In response Ocalan made the poorly informed decision to go to war with the Turkish State even in the face of their ideological base being essentially hollowed out/destroyed. This culminated in a drawn out period of warfare in which both sides committed brutal acts of violence. Both the PKK and the Turkish State hastily killed anyone who they saw as an enemy. The PKK captured and murdered journalists and tourists and the Turkish State killed thousands of civilians. It was finally ended

argued for their support of the PKK and it's satellites on the basis that they are the armed force of the civilian population's resistance to forces such as ISIS. I agree with them that what the rank and file on the ground has done is nothing short of amazing and heroic, especially the womyn's movement as mentioned before. However, the PKK is not the engine of this struggle, they only serve to benefit off it's back. The rank and file are the real engines and people such as the DAF should be targeting their support toward said people and not the PPK, PYD, and HDP themselves.

We need to take colonialism seriously enough to be critical of the PKK.

Western Backing

Everyone knows that the PKK receives arms and money from the American government, the debate over this topic often takes a rather childish form of petty insults from both sides and weak appeals to "real politik." The strongest argument that I have heard in defense of the PKK from those who cite their open acceptance of this support from the US is that the PKK are just taking this support "to survive." The idea being that the PKK could not continue to exist if it didn't take this materiel support from the United States. There are a few major flaws in this argument, however. The first being that the people making this claim never grapple with the question of weather or not something that needs to take aid from the US to exist is worth keeping alive in the first place. I think we have to ask ourselves that if we were in these situations given the option of take materiel support from the world's for most imperial power or at the least face the prospect of having to regroup, would we really be inclined to go with the former? And what motivations are incentivizing the PKK to take the former path? I think this also speaks to the vagueness of the point in general. What these people mean by "survive" is never explained so it's hard to draw any

class struggle and social revolution because the Kurdish people are oppressed by Turkish Colonialism and/or Imperialism. As a preface to the argument I am about to make I actually take issues of Colonialism (especially) and Imperialism extremely seriously. My counter-argument is not at all that these issues are not important nor even is it that these issues are of secondary importance. I actually pretty openly support anti-colonial struggles such as those of the native American resistance movement and I would be happy to strongly defend this support and advocate that others do the same. My problem is that I think the cheerleaders are actually guilty of not taking these issues seriously enough.

Cheerleaders seem to use these issues as bats to beat critics into submission with. As if a situation of colonialism or imperialism entails that we support any and every group that struggles against it uncritically and wholeheartedly. Just because the PKK exist in a situation of colonialism does not mean that they are doing anything positive in such a situation. Case and point, I know many Anarchist cheerleaders are highly critical of the Bolshevik seizure of power, yet would not this same logic oblige them to become the most ardent of Bolsheviks? I mean, the Bolsheviks existed during a time of revolution where the Czar and later the bourgeois republic were being overthrown. These were exceptional circumstances that we western Anarchists have no right to apply our critique of authoritarianism to. Did what I just say sound ridiculous? Obviously, because it is. If we can't criticize movements just because of the situational circumstances that have little to nothing to do with whether these movements and organizations are actually fulfilling a desired and justified goal then we pretty much ought to never criticize any movements ever. Liberal feminists, using this logic, need to be viewed uncritically because they are involved in the feminist movement and thus subject to "exceptional circumstances."

This leads into a less condescending and less, if I may be so bold, armchair argument from people who are actually somewhat involved in these things. The Syrian DAF Anarchist Federation has

with Ocalan making a peace deal with the Turkish Government. Given the PKK's Maoist influence it is not uncalled for to compare this period of their existence to many Maoist guerilla groups in the third world such as the Naxalites, the CPP-NPA, the Shinning Path, and the Nepal Maoist movement. These movements are categorized by long periods of sectarian and harsh violence that often have extreme consequences for the civilian population caught in the cross hairs. Usually these struggles end with said forces capitulating to the state or being smashed by it. The Naxalites have yet to do either and the period of violent stagnation and sectarian war wages on. The CPP-NPA was involved in peace negotiations with the state in 2004, but their umbrella organization, National Democratic Front of The Philippines, has got them to refuse any peace deals with the government and keep fighting. Other examples however show what the future of these two armed groups might very well be. Peru's Shinning Path lead by Abimael Guzman was destroyed and disbanded by the state after a long period of armed conflict. The Maoist movement in Nepal, after a long period of "protracted people's war" against the state became a parliamentary body with one of the parties, "Prachanda Path," becoming a neo-liberal party which repressed strikes and allows India to maintain foreign control of Nepal. The fact that for a few years the PKK was a textbook case of this kind of going nowhere, effectively anti-working class/peasantry insurgency should lead us to view their recent change in ideology critically. Do we really expect a former opportunist guerilla cell to change it's ideology and tactics on a dime and then everything be "ok" from there on out? I for one am extremely critical of this conclusion.

Exceptional Circumstances?

When people criticize national liberation or anti-colonial movements often the first reply is that "These people are existing in ex-

ceptional conditions of having to resist colonialism and/or imperialism and thus your criticisms are either invalid or irrelevant.” Here are a few examples taken from aforementioned articles defending the PKK:

This is the presumption Dauvé’s article starts with: we are not to judge the Kurdish movement, but we should not lose our heads admiring it either. So far, so good. But despite this claim of objectivity, the author ends up doing precisely what he tells us not to do: he applies the concepts and standards of Western political thought to the Rojava revolution and rules that it does not fit into his preconceived category of a “social revolution.”

Those anarchists (and they are not just a few) who do support the struggle for democratic autonomy in Kurdistan are reminded not to “lose their heads.” Their support is depicted as a sign of “spineless” radicalism because it does not adhere to God-knows-what puritan dogma. This is an interesting form of “anarchism,” I would say, if we consider the richness and diversity of the anarchist tradition. Apart from the patronizing discourse, it’s interesting to examine the facts and claims of these supposedly righteous and clear-headed arm-chair revolutionaries.

—Peter Stanchev
Roar Magazine

The criticism of the Rojava revolution as pretence while the most egregiously wrong, is not the only criticism. It is also attacked on the basis of not being a real ‘Proletarian Revolution’. This has been one that has been present since the very start. I remember being at the London Anarchist Bookfair in October

2014, Rojava was just exploding into the popular consciousness as the siege of Kobane kicked off. We all knew very little, but all wanted more. We all dutifully crowded into a too small room to be told of what was happening there. The speaker took questions afterwards and one of them asked ‘Who owns the Means of Production?’ The speaker did not understand the question. He tried again asking ‘What happened to the bourgeoisie?’ But the speaker did not understand.

Partly this was due to the speaker not speaking English natively, but it also showed a disconnect. The social reality of the Kurds, (And the history it is constructed from) is decidedly different to that of those who have grown up in the west, and so their perception of what a revolution is (and so what their revolution was) is very different. To a western Anarchist who first crossed blades with his oppressor during the Anti-Globalisation movement the idea of a free territory asking for foreign investment stinks of nothing less than counter-revolution, but our experience is not the experience of all. This is not to say that the limits to the economic revolution in Rojava do not worry me, much of the success of the mutualisation of the economy comes from the fact that many of the most powerful elements of the bourgeoisie fled. This installs a fear that in a real confrontation with capital the PYD may retreat.

—Steven Bertram-Lee
Kurdish Question

These types of arguments when applied to the PKK form the conclusion that the PKK need not be held to our “western” standards of