

Re-evaluating Anarchism

(Anarşizmi Yeniden Değerlendirmek)

Abdullah Öcalan

2002

After the dissolution of real socialism, or rather integrating of it with the system, the anarchist movements which are as old as real socialism and find their roots in French Revolution deserve a re-evaluation. Today it is better understood that the famous representatives of anarchism, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin were not completely wrong in their criticisms regarding the system and real socialism. They are salient (*catch attention*) with being located at the most opposite pole to the system, as being a movement who criticizes capitalism not only as private and state monopoly, but also as modernity.

The critiques they make towards the power, in both moralist (*ethical*) and political ways carry important level of truth inside. The social structures they come from effects the movement in obvious ways. The “class” reactions of aristocratic groups who lost power and city artisans who got relatively worse situation due to capitalism, reflect this very reality. The facts that they remain at an individual level, can not find grassroots and cannot develop a counter-system are strongly connected to their social structures. They know well what capitalism does, but they do not know well what they should do. If we summarize shortly their view;

1. They criticize the capitalist system from the most left position. They comprehend better that this system destroys the moral and political society. They do not attribute progressive role to capitalism, as Marxists do. Their approach to the societies destroyed by capitalism is more positive. They do not see those societies as backwards and obliged to decline, but find the survival of those more moral and political.
2. They have a more comprehensive and realistic approach towards the power and the state compared to Marxists. Bakunin is the one who said power is the absolute evil. However, demanding removal of power and state immediately at any rate is utopian and an approach which does not have so much chance to be realized in practice. They were able to foresee that socialism cannot be built based on the state and power, and that might end up in more dangerous and bureaucratic capitalism.
3. Their foresight, that centralist nation-state would be a disaster for all working class and popular movements and would crush their hopes, is realistic. They also turned out to be right in their critiques towards Marxists regarding the unification of Germany and Italy.

Their statement about history developing in favor of nation-states would mean big loss for the utopia of freedom and equality, their criticizing Marxists for taking position at the side of the nation-state and blaming them with betrayal are important aspects to emphasize. They defended confederalism.

4. Their ideas and criticisms on bureaucratism, industrialism and urbanization are verified up to a certain level. In their developing anti-fascist and ecologist stance at an early stage, those ideas and critiques played an important role.
5. Their criticisms towards the real socialism is also verified by the dissolution of the system. They are the fraction who diagnosed best that what was built was not socialism but state capitalism.

Despite their all those important and verified ideas and criticisms, it is quite puzzling that they could not massify themselves (*become a mass movement, original in turkish: kiteselleşme*) and find the chance of practical implementation. I believe this comes from serious deficiency and infirmity (*lack of firmness*) in their theory. The lack in their analysis of civilization and inability to develop an applicable system played an important role in this. Historical analysis of society and analysis of solutions were not developed.

Furthermore, they themselves carry the impact of positivist philosophy. It cannot be so much said that they were able to diverge from Euro-centric social sciences. Their biggest failure, according to me, is not being able to go into a systematic thought and structure regarding the democratic politics and modernity. They did not put the detailed effort in systematizing and practicing (implementation), which they put into correctness of their ideas and critiques. Maybe their class position hindered this.

Another important obstacle is the reaction they show against every kind of authority, in their theoretical views and in their practical lives. Projecting the rightful reaction they have against the power and the state authority into every form of authority and order, had impact on them not bringing democratic modernity into question in theory and in practice. I believe for them the most important aspect of self-critique is not seeing the legitimacy of democratic authority and necessity of democratic modernity.

In addition, not developing the option of democratic nation instead of nation-state is an important missing point and subject of self-critique. Without doubt, anarchists had an important impact in the dissolution of real socialism, development of feminist and ecologist movements, and growing of “civil society-ism” (*original in turkish: sivil toplumculuk*) in the left. However, repeating that they’ve been proven right does not mean a lot. The question they have to answer is why they did not develop an assertive activity and construction of a system. This brings our minds the deep gap between the theory and their lives. Were they actually able to overcome the modern life they criticize a lot? Or, how coherent are they in this? Are they able to leave the Euro-centric life and step into a real global democratic modernity?

It is possible to multiply similar question and critiques. It is a movement which showed great sacrifices in the history, which carried important thinkers within, took important space in the intellectual arena with its important idea and criticisms. The important thing is to gather this movement and the legacy of it inside of a coherent and growable counter-system. Compared to the real socialists, it is more possible for anarchists to trend towards daily praxis via self critique.

It is still important that they take the place they deserve in economic, social, political, intellectual and ethical struggle. In the struggles which gained speed and came forward with the cultural aspects in the ground of Middle East, it is possible for anarchists to both renew themselves and make strong contributions. They are one of the important forces that is needed to collaborate with in the works of re-construction of democratic modernity.

Abdullah Öcalan
Imrali prision, 2002

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Abdullah Öcalan
Re-evaluating Anarchism
(Anarşizmi Yeniden Değerlendirmek)
2002

Retrieved on 2020-04-13 from twitter.com

theanarchistlibrary.org