

Anarchist who Fought in Rojava

Response to 'No War But Class War' Debate

Anonymous

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I left Rojava nearly three years ago now and up until this point has chosen to remain quiet, leaving the writing to those who prefer to talk rather than act. I've looked on as the Ukrainians have gotten more support amongst the western anarchist milieu than the Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Yezidis and others could have ever imagined.

In the first month alone tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised for the "anti-authoritarians". Truckloads of medical ifaks, plate carriers, optics, thermals, and other combat supplies were sent at a moment's notice. There was zero hesitation amongst western anarchists when it came to mobilizing solidarity efforts for those affected by the Russian invasion.

My initial reaction was one of confusion. If the anarchist milieu has the capacity to fundraise money and donations on such a massive scale why in Rojava were we rationing what little celox we had and sharing a single plate carrier amongst many comrades rotating it based on who was going to the front? Our donations were in the hundreds of dollars and our collective funds were mostly built upon the stipend given by YPG. I recall the personal project of a close heval (comrade) who later fell sehid (martyr) which was to raise enough funds to obtain a single thermal for our unit. A project he spent months trying to coordinate and in the end was a failure. Simply no one cared enough to contribute.

The wildly disproportional logistical international solidarity for the struggle in Rojava compared to that of Ukraine aside. I find the ideological creation of the Ukrainian resistance as sacred to be the most disturbing. Recently an article was published on Abolition Media as well as with a disclaimer on It's Going Down. It was a critical take on the situation in Ukraine. I'm not going into the merits of the article because that simply is not the point of this piece. However, the article has caused shockwaves in the milieu by committing blasphemy against anarchism's new sacred cow: the Ukrainian resistance. A response article was published to IGD some days after and it is this which I'd like to respond to. Both the initial article and the response deal with a comparison between Rojava and Ukraine. The conflict voyeur who authors the response begins engaging with the question of Rojava by stating, "As someone whose own tendency to ask awkward questions has often (not always, but often) meant that I've been more of a critical observer of than an active participant in Rojava solidarity projects, I would very much like to see North American anarchists making an active effort to engage with the difficult questions that have often gone unanswered around Rojava."

From the very start of their discussion they admit that they were a critical observer of Rojava and ask the North American anarchists to engage in the “difficult questions unanswered around Rojava”. This isn’t necessarily wrong insofar as analyzing the contradictions of the Rojava project is beneficial for further radical development. It does, however right from the get-go demonstrate an entirely different approach than that of the unquestioning support for Ukraine. The struggle in Rojava which has a many decades-long history of radical politics and participation in militant struggles from training and fighting with Palestinians to contemporary resistance to Turkish Fascism and occupation was born and remains firmly within the revolutionary struggle. Rojava is very much at least within our purview if not tangential to our tradition. The resistance in Ukraine has absolutely nothing to do with the anarchist tradition whatsoever. Sure one can make arguments about the necessity of defense against encroaching imperialist interests and that’s all fine and good but it’s not a radical project. So then why is any criticism of the Ukraine resistance met with overhand bad jacketing and slander? I’ve never encountered something in the anarchist milieu to be so impenetrable to critique and elicit such a vile response if one dares to. From the Zapatistas to the Spanish Civil War to Rojava, everything is fair game for critique but daring to be critical of Ukraine is met with a venomous assault and accusations of apologism for everything from rape to genocide.

I’ll continue quoting the drivel of this arm-chair author. They go on to state, “It does also feel somewhat odd to see, after all the attacks on the Resistance Committee for not being pure enough, the authors championing the International People’s Guerrilla Forces and International Freedom Battalion, while also freely admitting how closely those groups were/are allied with Turkish Maoists and Marxist-Leninists. As though all the criticisms and arguments that anarchists have always made against Maoists and Marxist-Leninists somehow don’t apply to TiKKO or the THKP-C/MLSPB!” This quote is a perfect example of not letting absolute ignorance stop you from spewing your dumb opinion. First, where does this author pull MLSPB from? MLSPB didn’t even have people in IFB, they had a few kadro in Seri Kaniye, and there was limited interaction with them. As far as their discussion of TiKKO it was a relationship of material solidarity and TiKKO respected the full autonomy of the anarchists. TiKKO allowed political protection to the anarchists while they built capacity and diplomatic relations with the broader movement. Furthermore, there were many discussions with members of TiKKO recognizing the antithetical political positions and necessary conflict if the situation ever changed.

The author’s discussion of tentative alliances with communists demonstrates the absolutely absurd purist standards they held anarchists in Rojava to while simultaneously apologizing for cooperation with nationalists and the literal state military in Ukraine. It should be noted here that there is NO anarchist battalion in Ukraine. If you believe otherwise you need to research the topic further. They may be clustered but they are dispersed amongst regular territorial defense units. They are necessarily working alongside at the very least liberals if not nationalists and take their orders directly from the Ukrainian military. So according to the author, this is no problem and we can’t be too critical but damn those anarchists in Rojava for having an autonomous unit that had tentative diplomatic relations with some communists.

The last point that the author uses to delegitimize anarchist militants who lived, fought, and died in Rojava is as follows, “That might not be the most inspiring and uncompromising slogan, but some of us found it more convincing than some of the overheated rhetoric coming from IRPGF types that tried to portray a small group of people picking up guns, posing with English-language banners aimed at Western audiences, and making friends with Maoists as a dramatic

leap forward in anarchist theory and practice.” Here from the comfort of rhetorical fantasy the author attacks anarchists for “picking up guns” and “posing with banners”. First off, what do you think the RC is doing? Every single day there’s a new drop in telegram of them waving guns and sending messages to their supporters in the west. They make these posts precisely for the western IGD reader. And second, this is a massive oversimplification of what the project in Rojava was in order to dismiss it as larping foolishness. There’s no mention of the large-scale medical project that the anarchists created and engaged in often operating as the only medical unit directly on the front line. Or perhaps the experience and training it gave to many radicals in the tradition of the Bekaa Valley? Omission of these critical aspects is essential for the author’s narrative of westerners going to play militant.

The fact that I’m still defending anarchists going to Rojava years later while any criticism of Ukraine is met with moral outrage and vehement personal attacks demonstrates that western anarchists have a peculiar and visceral attachment to the situation there. I can only conclude that this is indicative of latent white supremacy within the anarchist milieu. Anyone who points out any contradictions with the situation in Ukraine is immediately ripped to pieces and bad-jacketed. People were openly shedding tears on anarchist podcasts for those in Ukraine while not a drop was spilled for the occupation of Afrin or Seri Kaniye. In fact, the radical milieu has largely forgotten about Rojava, and even when they did care, the solidarity efforts were infinitesimal compared to that of those in Ukraine.

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