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Letter from Turkish and Kurdish anarchists to Murray Bookchin

Fifth of May Group

1999

Dear Murray Bookchin,

We have just received the Turkish translation of your book, “Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm”, Kaos Yayinlari, Istanbul, May 1998, translated by Deniz Aytas.

The reading of the book overtook every other practical matter in our group and a consequent discussion was followed. We, an anarchist group, felt that some clarifications are needed since the author of the book happens to be Bookchin, a lifetime revolutionary, and the name on many anarchist theoretical writings.

All in all, the arguments put forward are very interesting as they address some crucial issues discussed in anarchist movements in North America and Europe. Our main concern is the introduction, written by yourself specifically for the Turkish translation of the book, and its implications for the newly emerging anarchist movement in Turkey.

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In your Introduction — if the translation is accurate — you stated that you were shocked to see that Zen Buddhism — Taoism and lifestyle anarchism, the popular new tendencies in North America and Europe, are also spreading to Turkey. When we first saw those lines we were completely taken aback and failed to understand the relevance of such a statement with the issues facing the anarchist movement in Turkey. Later, through discussions we reached the conclusion that you, understandably enough, are not familiar with politics in Turkey and such information must have come from the Turkish publisher.

First of all, we must deal with the issue of spreading Zen Buddhism — Taoism and hastily add that such a problem is not even being discussed in Turkish anarchist circles since it simply does not exist! Turkey is a country dominated by Islam and its culture has no historical or philosophical connections with the beliefs and religions in question. It would suffice to say that so far, we have not seen any article or reference to the issue, either for or against, in any anarchist writings in Turkey.

The crucial point of the introduction is the bit making references to lifestyle anarchism. This is a controversial issue, which mostly relates to Western anarchist movements, but we have to say that it has no bearing on the Turkish and Kurdish radical movements. Here, we are talking about a country in which the father of individualist anarchism, Max Stirner, is yet to be translated (we have seen one article only translated into Turkish in Germany, in 1988) let alone the American theoreticians mentioned in your book. Therefore such criticism have no actual audience in Turkey. What we are left with is the radical young generation which rebels against their patriarchal family structure and the authoritarian Turkish establishment. In their rebellious way, they feel the need of using some marginal symbols and insignia. But above all, their intentions are revolutionary. As we mentioned earlier, Turkey has just started to experience the emergence of anarchist movement. As you will

agree, all radical upsurges of social unrest in history had past through similar eccentric stages and we do not believe that you meant to criticise such naivety.

As you will agree again, a particular approach or criticism may well be relevant to a particular movement or a country but that particularity would not necessarily apply to another country which has its own unique particulars and is going through entirely different phases. Today, the crucial question of anarchism in Turkey is how to create a libertarian alternative to the centralist-authoritarian traditional left as the anarchist movement of Turkey is rising from the ashes of longstanding orthodox Marxist and Stalinist left. In turkey, under such circumstances, to identify the problem as drawing a line between lifestyle anarchism and social anarchism is simply the call of the old blood. The people who badly needed such an intervention by “an external anarchist authority” kave knowingly misled you about the nature of the problem and tried to manipulate the situation. Sadly, those are the anarchists who still suffer from similar old authoritarian traditional habits.

With solidarity,

5th May Group

(Turkish and Kurdish Anarchists in Exile)