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Conversation with Sinan Çiftyürek on the Kurdish question and the communists

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On May we had the chance to talk with the spokesman of the Mesopotamian Socialist Party, a revolutionary Kurdish group, Sinan Çiftyürek. Although he comes from a different political angle than us, we believe there are many interesting issues raised by the interview that are of use for anyone in the revolutionary movement. Sinan Çiftyürek, with an open mind and a critical spirit, talks of the Kurdish struggle and imperialism.

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1. First of all, what's the situation of the struggle for Kurdish liberation nowadays?

Sinan Çiftyürek: In the past the Kurdish national liberation movement had an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist content. The socialist identity of the national liberation movement was evident in the biggest part of the Kurdistan i.e. Northern Kurdistan. All

parties and organisations claimed to be Marxists and Leninists. But after the collapse of the USSR and the socialist block, these organisations quickly withdrew from these ideological positions. It was not only their socialist objective what they gave up, but also their anti-imperialist aim. Today the Kurdish national liberation movement, except for the communists, is limited to the anti-colonial aim. A nationality which has to counter imperialism is full of problems and the Kurdish national liberation movement has been experiencing these problems very deeply.

2. We have seen some events of repression escalating in Turkey -do you think the AKP government or the EU negotiations could play some moderating effect over these levels of repression?

Sinan Çiftyürek: There is an increase in the oppression and the operations against the Kurdish people and this trend tended to increase in the period just passed. For over the last years, the chauvinistic Turkish regime is pursuing an open policy to exclude, to alienate and to make a dartboard out of the Kurds. This has been stated by the representatives of the highest levels of the state and openly continues to be so. The Chief of General Staff, General Yaşar Büyükanıt even is stating that everyone who does not say “how happy I am to be a Turk” is an enemy of the Republic of Turkey and that he will remain so. He also says that a guerrilla cannot keep fighting without the logistical support of the peasants and claims that imams and demarches are giving logistical support to the guerrillas. If he openly and totally takes aim at the Kurdish people, the attacks on the people will continue and increase in the following period.

In this period, neither the new AKP government nor the EU process can play a role in softening the oppression. The EU has already more than one of its own Kurds. Northern Ireland, Bask Country, Catalonia etc. AKP cannot think differently from the army on the question of the Kurdish national liberation struggle. The reason why AKP did not support an operation to Southern Kurdistan had

to do with the nearing elections, with the fact that they did not want the army to make a final decision.

3. What has been the response from the Turkish government to the fact that Kurdish Iraq functions as a separate entity?

Sinan Çiftyürek: The Southern Kurdistan is still not able to move independently from Iraq, because it is not an independent State. It exists within the federal system of Iraq as the Kurdish Federal State.

Turkey is not able to tolerate even a federal Kurdish structure. It continuously threatens it with attack. Over the last years the Turkish State has seen the Kurdish Federal State as the greatest threat against itself, because it thinks that the structure in the Southern Kurdistan is triggering the national liberation movement in the north.

4. One of the main arguments of the detractors of Kurdish independence has been to insist in the fact that it is not desirable a landlocked Kurdistan if you can be part eventually of the EU; in what way the oil-rich de facto Kurdish state affects this view?

Sinan Çiftyürek: The question of EU membership is only relevant for the Northern Kurdistan, that is, the part in Turkey. It is also still debatable if Turkey will gain EU membership. The chances are almost equal one way or the other. The EU process creates an expectation for the reduction of the oppression among the Kurdish people who have been beaten by the State for centuries. But these expectations are also melting with time. The fact that the main tendency in the Northern part is federalism instead of independence is not something new and it not directly related to the EU process, but has been there since the 1970's.

Can the Kurdish Federal State in the south become independent and what would be the results of it? It is hard to give definite answers to these questions today. But I should state what I believe: The Southern Kurdistan can affect the north, but it cannot push it

on its direction! The highest potential to affect and to push forward is in the north and it is also questionable if it can really do it. There are many examples of different States coming from the same nation and this can also happen to the Kurds.

5. You have said that the interests of the US and the interests of the Kurdish people have been in coincidence at points; many people have actually singled out the Kurdish as collaborators. But for how long you believe this coincidence of interests will last? What role do you think the Kurdish question is playing in the war on terror and the New Middle East project of Bush?

Sinan Çiftiyürek: Firstly, I should note this: Imperialism does not have friends or enemies; it has interests. Its hostility and friendship depends on its interests. A friend of the US or the UK can become an enemy one day.

The US wanted to be sovereign in the Eurasia in the 21st century so to stand on its own land. In the early 1990's he transformed this into a long-term strategy.

English geopolitics scientist Sir Harold Mackinder said as early as in 1904 that he who rules over Eurasia will rule over the earth. And American strategist Brzezinski notes in his book "The Grand Chessboard" that in the 21st century the most important strategic reward for the US will be controlling Eurasia. I don't want to keep going on. These remarks shape the basis of the 21st century strategy of the US.

The US wanted to circle and neutralize Russia and then China. It knows that neutralizing these two states will pave the way for controlling Eurasia. The aim of the Eurasian strategy is certain and Afghanistan and then Iraq are occupied to reach this aim.

The US also gave to the Kurdish national liberation movement a place in its Eurasia strategy since it is at the hearth of the Middle East. It was the US who invited the Kurdish people for cooperation, knowing that they have been beaten by the four states and yearn for their own State. This invitation had a positive response. The

20th century and he contributed and reproduced Marxism under the context of changing conditions on the world and Russia.

The contemporary world communist movement should base on Marxism, on the relevant universal sides of Leninism and the revolutionary spirit of the 20th century which attacked the heavens. But it should break from the political programme and practical struggle methods specific to the 20th century and from the communist structures of the last century which became a new social democratic movement.

We understand the communist organisations of the 20th century and think that it should not be repeated today.

In the 20th century the relationship between discipline and freedom was defined as freedom in discipline. But freedom did not find a place to live under the limits of discipline. In the party, organisation discipline was from outside and we cannot keep it so. We accept and aim discipline in freedom and to transform discipline to an internal phenomena.

In the 20th century party structure the determining part of democratic centralism was centralism. Therefore the place for direct democracy decreased in the organisation. Today the relationship between democracy and centralism should be reconfigured to emphasize democracy.

In the 20th century communist movement the center had the status of god and the general secretary had the status of the prophet. In a big party the base of the party i.e. the body followed the central committee or the general secretary, if they moved to a leftist position or to right wing opportunism.

Briefly we, Kurdish communists, aim at a party/organisation strong in the body, not in the centre. The ideological, philosophical, political power should be concentrated in the body of the organisation. And the final decision maker should be the body. We call this "organisation or party strong in body".

around the world, but only a few can act independently from imperialism. The conflict between imperialism and the oppressed peoples is changed after the liquidation of the classical colonialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America. While the imperialists' openly assumed aspects get weaker, its social-class aspects with their economic, social and cultural content loomed larger. In the 20th century the determining aim of the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America was national liberation. In the 21st century this left its place to social revolutions aiming to economic independence. Briefly, these continents are preparing to new revolutions against imperialism and also capitalism. The waves from the depths give the first signs of this.

10. Having suffered a number of defeats as well as changes in the context over the last couple of decades, what's the future you see for left wing politics? What type of movement and organisation do you think is best suited for the tasks you see ahead? I remember we were talking of the criticism about centralism and the theocratic organisation what I think is particularly relevant...

Sinan Çiftiyürek: I don't believe that history is in search for a new way. In other words, the movement of freedom and socialism are developing a fight to give again a direction and shape to history. This fight is growing deeper and on a larger scale than in the last century, just like the development from the 19th to the 20th century. I have no doubt of it. Humanity and especially the oppressed people are preparing for a final fight against capitalism. We are at the beginning of the 21st century and the communist and today's revolutionary movement in general should be liberated from the shadow of the revolutionary movement of the 20th century. In history, breaks and continuities always developed side by side. Every break formed a bridge between the past and the future as continuity. Lenin was a political genius who could apply the break and the continuity. Lenin did not repeat the experience of Marxism in the

Kurds, mainly the southern/Iraqi Kurds, tied to the US against the dictatorship of Saddam as "one ties to the infidel from the faithless".

The duration of this cooperation depends on the developments in the region and especially in Iraq. I don't think that this cooperation is durable, but thinking that it will end soon would also be wrong.

Kurdish national movement is an important dynamic in the Middle East. Either the revolutionary movement will use this 40-millions-strong potential for the advantage of the people and the revolutionary transformation or imperialism will use the Kurdish national potential as a part of its divide-and-rule policies and of its aim to rule Asia.

6. What do you believe to be the main priorities for Kurdish people in the current regional context?

Sinan Çiftiyürek: The answer to this question requires detailed and long answers starting with the sociological structure of the Kurds. It is not possible to do it given the limits of this interview. But I can note this: The Kurdish people are one of the indigenous peoples of Mesopotamia like the Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians etc. As well, the Kurdish people and the peoples and societies constantly interacting with one another are one of the creative dynamics in the Middle East. Especially Hurris have a historical importance for fulfilling the role of a bridge between the West and the East. They played an important role in the making of the Mesopotamian culture through the interaction with Hittites, Palestinians and Phoenicians and carried this to ancient Greece and Western Europe.

7. Now that can be seen a number of movements in all of the Middle East claiming to fight imperialism and US hegemony -how do you see the fight against imperialism in the region?

Sinan Çiftiyürek: The ongoing fight against imperialism in the region is full of problems from many angles. "The footprint of the horse is mixed with the one of the dog". Only a revolutionary uprising from the depths can win it.

It is full of problems, because the US financed, supported and directed many Islamic organizations in the region during the Cold War with the aim of forming a “Green Belt” (Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Egypt) to prevent Russia’s advance. Today we see these organisations in the anti-US front!

It is full of problems, because the militarist forces of the Saddam regime also joined the anti-US front, because the US did not give them a place in the post-Saddam regime!

It is full of problems, because there are no more anti-imperialist nationalist movements around leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mohammad Mossadegh, Hafiz al-Assad.

It is full of problems, because the communist movement is weak in the region. This was the political climate which gave the opportunity to invade Iraq. Of course in no place on earth is democracy brought by tanks and thus it will not be brought to Iraq.

Due to the reasons I already noted, the struggle against imperialism is problematic. The radical resolution of these problems depends on the re-birth and development of the struggles of the working class and the oppressed people not only against imperialism, but also against capitalism.

8. What are the main features or changes you see in international capitalism and imperialism over the last while? How does this affect the struggles in the region and in Kurdistan?

Sinan Çiftiyürek: Dear comrade, I should write a little brochure to answer to this question. We prepared a manifesto answering it and we will soon end the debates around it. After the manifesto assumes its definite shape in the following weeks, we will translate it into English and share it with the world communist movement.

After this remark let me explain myself briefly. Firstly, Lenin’s analysis of imperialism maintains its relevance, but there are also some new developments and we should take them into consideration. I think that in a short period of time the “Empire” thesis was refuted by life.

Secondly, I believe that globalisation is not something new. Its roots are in the past. The comment of Marx that history became world history with capitalism explains many things. The capitalist globalisation fastened over the last 15–20 years after the socialist block collapsed.

Thirdly, capitalism is not just historically on the end of the road, but it also reached its natural (physical) borders. The natural resources of our earth cannot carry the weight of the capitalist consumer culture. If the whole Asia and mainly China and India enter to this culture, the end of our earth will come. So humanity needs quickly to throw capitalism to the litter bin of history, because capitalism is dragging humanity and the world to collapse.

Capitalism blessed property and gave it the status of a god, but in this process a majority of the world is also dispossessed. Capitalism transformed economic work from a mean to an end, but capitalism also detaches wage labour from work using technology. Capitalism commodifies everything human, commercializes everything that is social and makes nature and humans the notaries of the markets. If production and consumption were not the undividable aspects of a cycle i.e. if the large masses were not in a dynamics of consumption, capitalism will not even consider humans worth exploiting!

9. How do you see the future of national liberation struggles?

Sinan Çiftiyürek: The classical national liberation movements on earth were superseded at the end of the 20th century. After the collapse of the classical colonialism, the States around the world increased from 40 to above 200. Since everyone encircle their garden with national fences and put a national flag in the middle of it, the national independence movements will not be a determining dynamics. There are only a few unresolved national questions. Briefly, Asia, Africa and America formally gained their national independence, but imperialism came back down the chimney after he was ousted from the door. There are more than 200 states