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An anarchist among jihadists

A view from the grassroots of the Syrian revolution

Mohammed

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As an anarchist it wasn't easy for me to be among Jihadists, but for some reason, it wasn't the same treating them as a doctor.

From the first moment I entered the hospital where I was working I was clear that I would treat anyone who needed my help, be they civilians, or fighters from any group, religion or sect. I was determined that no one would be mistreated inside that hospital, even if they were from Assad's army.

It is true that not all the free army militants are devoted jihadists, although most of them think – or say – that what they are practising is 'Jihad'. But the truth is that there are a lot of ordinary people among them, as in any armed struggle.

Yes, I helped some jihadists to survive and others to go back to fight. But my real intention was to help the masses I belong to, firstly as a physician, and secondly as an anarchist.

My real problem, and that of the oppressed in general I think, is not with god himself, but with human beings who act as gods and are so sick with authority that they think and act like gods, be they secular dictators like Assad or Islamic imams.

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God himself is never as deadly dangerous as those who ‘speak’ for him.

My first and lasting impression about the current situation in Syria is that there is no longer a popular revolution going on there. What is taking place is an armed revolution that could now simply degenerate into a civil conflict.

The Syrian people — who showed unprecedented courage and determination in the first few months of the revolution, defying Assad’s regime despite its brutality — are now exhausted. Nineteen long months of fierce repression, hunger, widespread scarcity and continuous bombardment by the regime’s army have weakened their spirit. And the beneficiary of all this hasn’t been the regime, but the opposition, especially the Islamists.

Drawing on its international relationships — especially those with the rich Gulf despotisms — the latter can now feed and support the hungry population in the areas controlled by its forces. Without such support, a grave humanitarian situation would be taking place.

But this support is not provided for free, either by the Gulf rulers or the opposition leaders. They, like any other authoritarian force, are asking the masses for submission and obedience, and this can only mean the real death of the Syrian revolution as a courageous popular act of the Syrian masses.

The problem with what is happening now in Syria is not only the difficult and bloody process of changing a ruthless dictatorship, but that we may be substituting it with another dictatorship, which could be worse and bloodier.

Early in the revolution, a small number of people — mainly devoted Islamists — claimed to represent the revolting masses and appointed themselves the true representative of the revolution. This went unchallenged by the mainstream of the revolutionary masses and intellectuals. We [anarchists] opposed these claims, but we were — and still are — too few to make any real difference.

These people claimed that what was taking place was a religious war, not just a revolution of oppressed masses against their oppressor, and they aggressively used the fact that the oppressor [Assad] was from a different sect of Islam than the majority of the people he was exploiting — a sect that Sunni scholars have judged to be against the teachings of true Islam.

We were shocked by the fact that the majority of Alawis (the sect of the current dictator), who are poorer and more marginalised than the Sunni majority, supported the regime; and participated in his brutal suppression of the revolution. And this was used as ‘evidence’ of the ‘actual religious war’ taking place between Sunnis and Alawis.

Then came the material support from the Gulf rulers.

Now the potential for any real popular struggle is decreasing rapidly. Syria today is governed by weapons, and only those who have them can have a say about its present and future.

And this is not just true for Assad’s regime and its Islamic opposition. Everywhere in the Middle East the great hopes are disappearing rapidly. The Islamists seem to be getting all of the benefits of the people’s courageous struggles and could easily initiate the process of establishing their fanatical rule without strong opposition from the masses.

The other issue that I think is important for us — Arab anarchists and the Arab masses — is how to build the libertarian alternative. That is, how to initiate effective anarchist or libertarian propaganda and build libertarian organisations.

To tell the truth, I have never tried to convince anyone to be an anarchist and have always thought that trying to affect others is another way of practicing authority upon them.

But now I see this issue from another perspective. It is all about making anarchism ‘available’ or known to those who want to fight any oppressing authority, be they workers, the unemployed, students, feminists, the youth, or ethnic and religious minorities.

It is about trying to build an example — or sample — of the new free life, not only as a living manifestation of its potential presence, but also as a means to achieve that society.

Our Stalin or Bonaparte is not yet in power, and the Syrian masses still have the opportunity to get a better outcome than that of the Russian revolution. It is true that this is difficult and is becoming more so every minute, but the revolution itself was a miracle, and on this earth the oppressed can create their miracles from time to time.

We, Syrian anarchists, are putting all our cards and all our efforts with the masses. It could be no other way, or we would not deserve our libertarian name