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Reply from Murray Bookchin to '5th of May Group' on Turkish anarchism

Murray Bookchin

June 7, 1998

Dear 5th May Group,

Sometime last year the comrades at Kaos Yayinlari wrote to me, asking me to write an preface for their translation of "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism." Based on their assessment of the Turkish situation from their vantage point in Istanbul, they had determined that a translation of this book into Turkish was needed. Since I had little knowledge of Turkish anarchism, I had asked them what points they would like me, in my preface, to emphasize.

I wrote:

"I'm somewhat perplexed by how I could make [a preface] relevant to an anarchist culture—yours—that, judging from your description, doesn't seem to have lifestyle anarchists. Or does it? ... I would be grateful if you could let me know a little bit more how this book would be relevant to Turkish

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anarchists, and what points you think I ought to emphasize that would be helpful in advancing social anarchism in Turkey.”

I do not wish to quote from their reply without their permission. But they told me, in essence, that there are various anarchists in Turkey who have absorbed various European anarchist tendencies, especially its alternative music and fashion culture, which makes them receptive to the kind of “lifestyle” approach that I criticized. Even though Stirner himself is unknown in Turkey, they explained to me, such an anarchist current does exist, influenced by Nietzsche and situationism.

Not knowing Turkish, I had no way to check their analysis, but I had no reason to doubt them. The fact that the Unabomber manifesto had been published in Turkish (by Kaos themselves, no less) signaled to me that antitechnological, anticivilizational tendencies were gaining a foothold in Turkey.

It puzzles me that you would suggest that Kaos “suffer from similar old authoritarian traditional habits,” since they appear to me to be very close to lifestyle anarchists on many issues. They and I had already discussed our significant differences over technology. In my view, it is all the more to their credit that they chose to publish my book, despite their own disagreements with some aspects of my analysis.

It also greatly alarmed me, a year ago, to see an issue of a Turkish periodical (I believe it was Ates Hirsizi, but it may have been A-Politika; I no longer have my copy) that contained an article by John Clark. Clark is a Taoist anarchist and is in fact very aggressively trying to transform social ecology into a mystical variant of Taoism and promotes it in many venues. He has aligned himself with anarchists in the United States who are absorbed not only with Taoism but with Buddhism, Native American spirituality, New Age spirituality, wicca (neopaganism), occultism, and so on. I do not know if he mentioned Taoism in his article. But I mentioned this issue in my preface in order to

call the reader’s attention to the problem. I am certainly glad to learn from you that any attempts to import Taoism into Turkey will likely not be successful.

For the rest, it seems to me that your debate is less with me than with the people at Kaos Yayinlari who chose to publish my book. I am forwarding this letter to them; since you have already made your letter public on A-Infos and perhaps elsewhere, I do not feel that I am breaching your privacy by sending a copy to them as well. I would appreciate your circulating my reply to the people to whom you have circulated your own letter.

Sincerely, Murray Bookchin