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My Experience with Communes and Committees in Rojava

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August 2, 2018

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Retrieved on 2019-10-10 from
[https://komun-academy.com/2018/08/02/
my-experience-with-communes-and-committees-in-rojava/](https://komun-academy.com/2018/08/02/my-experience-with-communes-and-committees-in-rojava/)

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My Rojava experience began with six months in the YPG during the campaign to liberate Raqqa from Daesh. During those six months I was fortunate to begin to understand the camaraderie which thrives within YPG/YPJ. It was amazing to see how the ideology is truly evident in every aspect of daily life. With each day we advanced further into Raqqa and with each step we were able to see people returning to their newly liberated city. It was at this point that I began to see the earnest joy and fierce commitment the people had to their hard-earned freedom. With the successful liberation of Raqqa, I had the opportunity to begin work on the civil side of the Rojava revolution.

In late October I arrived in Qamishlo, to begin working with Saziya Yekiti u Pistgiriya Gelan (SYPG), the Association for the Unity and Solidarity of Peoples. The institute was involved in a number of projects from organization of political events to community organizing within the commune system. The pri-

mary focus of my work was in the neighborhood of Heliliye. In Heliliye I was able to see the commune system first hand.

The commune (komun) system is truly the beating heart of the Rojava revolution. It is based on the premise of Democratic Confederalism, that the power comes from the grassroots level. At the first level of the system is the commune. Each neighborhood will have a number of communes based on its size. A commune typically has a small community center that serves several blocks within the neighborhood.

In the commune there are two co-chairs, they are from and nominated by the community. It is mandatory that one of the two co-chairs is a woman. Working alongside the co-chairs is the committee made up of volunteers from the community, nominated by the community. Each committee member covers a specific responsibility such as; defense, ecology, economy, health, etc. The areas covered by the committee can vary depending on what the people of each commune decide. Finally, the communes are often supported by what are known as professional revolutionaries who have pledged their lives to the movement.

Co-Chairs:

Co-Chairs are responsible for the day to day maintenance of the commune. They remain at the commune to meet with the people who visit the commune on a daily basis. Co-Chairs will also organize formal and informal meetings with the committee members, professionals and the people of the community. During meetings they will help to facilitate discussions, run through the agenda, record and address; critiques, needs, requests and suggestions. In cases where an issue cannot be resolved at the smaller level, or a request requires a larger scale of coordination, the co-chairs will bring it to the Meclisa Taxa (neighborhood assembly/council) at the mala gel (house of the people). Co-Chairs can be removed by the people of the commune at any time should they be deemed unfit.

Committees:

Committee members visit each of the homes that are part of the commune. They hold discussions with the people in order to understand what the critiques, needs or suggestions are related to the subject they are responsible for. They will then relay any critiques, needs or suggestions to the co-chairs.

For example, in one commune, the health committee member, had been informed by a family that one of their family members was continuing to suffer from abdominal pain despite having been following the prescribed diet and taking the medicine he had been given. Since the man was unable to leave his home, the committee member went to the hospital for him and raised the issue with the doctor, the doctor then determined that the man had been given the wrong medication. The committee member worked with the doctor to procure the correct medication and brought it back to the man.

All of these aspects work together with the people of the community in order to create a system of checks and balances which prevent bureaucratization, deter stagnation, and ensure that the will of the people is being carried out.

Within the system of Democratic Confederalism, the commune is the most critical component, everything flows up from the grassroots level to the larger structures. The flow of ideas, critiques, suggestions and mobilizations is as follows;

Komun (Commune)

Meclîsa Taxa (Neighborhood Assembly)

Melclîsa Bajarê (City-wide Assembly)

Meclîsa Kantonê (Cantonal Assembly)

Meclisa Suriya Demokratik (Syrian Democratic Council)

From my time working in the communes, I saw how they had become a vital part of each community's daily life. People would visit the communes everyday whether it was to simply have a tea and a chat or to engage in vigorous discussions of the global geo-political situation. The level of civic engagement far exceeded anything I had seen in the west. Every meeting I attended hosted a full house and often would involve thor-

ough debates and discussions on all matters. The people continuously exhibited a tenacious, tireless dedication to every aspect of communal and political life.

In the west, civic engagement, especially in the electoral process, is a perpetual struggle. Often due to the perception that as individuals we are unable to change the system, or that the system has long ceased to truly represent the will of the people. Furthermore, western society and culture has become dominantly individualistic. Capitalist modernity has further isolated people from one another, often encouraging the privatization of superficial status markers. With the advances in technology and the onset of social media, meaningful face to face human interaction has become more of a rarity.

Despite the overbearing presence of these factors, the system in Rojava has managed not only to rise to the forefront but to thrive. The commune system and the ideas of Democratic Confederalism have formed a synergistic realization with the preexisting collective society within the region, in doing so the Rojava revolution has given birth to a viable alternative to capitalism. In this revolution we, as humans, have been and will continue to be gifted with lessons that will undoubtedly lead us to the next phase in our evolution, should we let it.