

# **Our attitude towards Rojava must be critical solidarity**

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Many articles from different people about Rojava have expressed different views. The vast majority of them have covered the positive and bright sides of this experiment. I too have written many articles, in both Kurdish and English. In addition, I have given many interviews to Kurdish and non-Kurdish media. I have attended and addressed several meetings, both in the UK and abroad. I travelled once to Rojava and twice to Bakur (the Kurdistan part of Turkey).

This article is about both Rojava and Bakur, as I am more optimistic about Bakur than about Rojava. As a result, I am prepared to receive considerable backlash from those who read this article, especially from Kurdish people. They either do not accept any criticism or they blindly support both movements without seeing the negative sides of either. I am open to criticism and accept their different opinions and even accusations. However, I am very supportive concerning Rojava and Bakur, and a committed person for social revolution wherever it exists.

Before delving into the main issues, I would like to add that I believe that having an entirely supportive attitude toward something makes one a blind follower, and having an entirely critical attitude makes one narrow-minded. In both cases, one sees what one wants to see, not what is there. So I try to support my opinions with evidence and a clear conscience. I must also say that last year the Kurdistan Anarchist Forum (KAF) (of which I am a member), on two occasions, wrote to the senior figures in the PKK, the PYD, the Tev-Dem and other groups and organisations, attempting to call their attention to some of the problems. The KAF has not yet received any response.

## **Why are there problems in Rojava?**

Anyone who demands a 'pure movement' is either unrealistic or simply wants the movement to produce whatever is in his/her mind and to conform to his/her wishes. We should understand that life is neither a one-way street nor a straightforward road. The movement is a people's movement, and people consist of individuals, and these individuals are tied to, and tied down by, all the bad things that the system has produced and continues to produce. Even if we want to reject the superfluous things in society, the system limits our agency and our wishes. However strongly one wishes to be 'a pure person' or 'a 100% anarchist' in rejecting undesirable things, the system one lives in throws up big barriers and obstacles.

This applies both to Rojava and to the movement in Bakur as well. In order to avoid 'purity' and unrealistic judgment, we need to look at both in connection with the whole situation surrounding these movements inside their countries, regionally and internationally. Especially in Rojava, we see continuous war, threats of civil war, attacks by Assad, threats from the state of Turkey, and economic, political and social embargo. In addition, there exist two powerful and hierarchical political parties. All these barriers restrict the movement's progress towards actual social revolution.

To isolate Rojava's movement from its context, and also from the outcome of the Arab Spring and from the persistently inadequate international support and solidarity, would mean we can never analyse Rojava properly. Yet criticising it without supporting it would undermine the movement and its people, who have sacrificed themselves for this cause.

In Rojava's movement we must consider a couple of very important points in making our judgment. First: Has it achieved more than it has lost? Do the positive points outweigh the negative? Second: What is the direction of the movement? In my opinion, Rojava's movement is still on the right track and has not missed its right direction, at least until now. Its future cannot be predicted and, as a whole, depends on many factors, including some of the above. At present the important thing for us, as unionists, leftists, communists, socialists and anarchists, is to support that movement in order to help it progress.

### **What are the problems with both movements?**

After I visited Rojava in May 2014, I wrote a report on it in two parts.

The first described the situation as it was, while the second described my 'fears and expectations' about Rojava's revolution. It was very important for me because the future of Rojava depended on 'expectations' of whether the experiment would succeed or fail. Some of those expectations became real and have since become very big and complicated issues. Others are still on a 'waiting list' and could still become major threats to the movement. I did not mention Isis in my 2014 report because at the time it had not yet become a major force, posing a threat to half the world. It became a very powerful, brutal force as soon as it occupied Mosul, just a few days after my return to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Some of the problems both movements are now facing are small and can be resolved. But others, in my opinion, could affect the future of Rojava. These problems are neither trivial nor fleeting, such that they can be ignored. In fact, some of them are so serious already that they have affected and influenced the movement.

Here I shall attempt to discuss them point by point.

#### **1. The media's language**

If one reads Rojnews, listens to Sterk TV and follows social media, especially Facebook most of the time, one repeatedly comes across racist language, in words such as 'Turkish police', 'Turkish force, Turkish forces', 'Turkish Gendarme', 'Turkish government', 'Turkish state'. These words are repeated daily.

I am aware that those who use this sort of language are not racist. Rather, they are not educated enough to match their language with the current direction of the movement in Bakur, or else they are not professional enough in the way they perform their jobs. Whatever the reason, these terms are still racist and are against Ojlan's messages and statements, and do not serve aims of the movement. How do we know that the member of police who was killed, or the killer, is Turkish, not Kurdish? Let's suppose it is Turkish, but why not say 'a member of police of the government of Turkey' or of 'the force/s of the state of Turkey'?

The government and the state in Turkey are not a Turkish state or Turkish government only. They also have a Kurdish element, despite the fact those Kurds do not speak Kurdish or admit they are Kurdish. There are 20 million Kurdish people in Turkey, several million of whom probably support the government. Many Kurdish tribes and clans also still support the government of Turkey, as do some Kurdish political parties there.

It is important to use the right and appropriate language. The media avoid sexist words and words humiliating women, so I cannot understand why they use racist words and sentences daily!

They also use other inappropriate words, like the word 'bandits' to refer to Isis. I do not know where they got this word for Isis, but it is very common among the vast majority of Kurdish writers and journalists. But using this word for Isis is unfair to bandits. When did 'bandits' commonly rape, kill and sell women? When and where were 'bandits' a brutal enemy of humanity, animals and nature? When and where did 'bandits' launch war on a few billion people, even on people who are Sunni but who do not practice their religion in the same way as they? Those who use the word 'bandits' for Isis either do not know the meaning of the word in Kurdish, or do not have an accurate assessment of the brutality of Isis.

We do not hear this racist language in Rojava's media very often. When we hear it occasionally, we know the speaker is originally from Iraq or Iranian Kurdistan.

Another inappropriate word is one that is used for people who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of the movement: 'martyr'. How do you use the word 'martyr' for an atheist person or for someone who belongs to a secular organisation? The word 'martyr' is a religious word and is inappropriate to use for YPG and YPJ fighters.

Some of the leaders or people in high positions within the PKK, the HDP and the PYD do, from time to time, use racist and inappropriate language, too.

Murat Karayilan, the head of PKK Guerrilla, on December 30, 2015, told Rojnews, "In defying the brutality of the Turkish state our own self-rule is announced. The citizens, women and children are killed daily by Turkish police and soldiers" [emphasis mine]. In the same interview he said of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), "We are hoping in this situation all the political parties of the Kurdish people acknowledge all these behaviors of the fascist and Turkish occupier in order to act rightly and offer support" [emphasis mine].

For me, it is a disaster to hear these words coming from the main commander of the PKK Guerrilla and one of the PKK leaders. They are the exact opposite of what Ojalan says and wants to be said. At that level, he should either not speak, or when he speaks, his speech should reflect the politics of his party and of the movement.

Even Selahattin Demirtas occasionally speaks like a Kurdish nationalist. I will come back to this in another point.

On January 5, 2016, Rojnews reported that Salih Muslim was talking about the progress of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in taking back territory from Isis. He criticised the reaction and hostility of Turkey, and said, "The lands have been taken back and they [have] nothing to do with Turkey, so why is Turkey setting up a red line?...Turkey and Syria are the same Turkish Military [emphasis mine] on the border who started killing civilians in Rojava, but their brutality cannot stop our victory."

In my opinion, purging racist and inappropriate words from our language would not be difficult. The media could censor and filter all the news when monitoring their writings and statements, before publishing them. If anybody is not improving his/her language, then there are so many approaches that can be taken in educating and training them.

## **2. The bad interviews, bad announcements, and withdrawing from democratic confederalism**

Those of us who follow the events, interviews and the media of Rojava and Bakur closely can see that a big departure from the original principles of Ojlan is under way in both movements.

On April 5, 2015, Ojlan's lawyers and all delegations were all banned from seeing him. Since then the HDP, PKK, and PYD have been deprived from his deep thought and valuable advice, instructions and recommendations. I personally think some of the powerful people in the parties and the movements have used it as an opportunity to give interviews and instructions against Ojlan's wishes. In fact, they managed to change the policies of their parties in ways that are not in the interest of the movements.

Some talks, statements and interviews have been nonsensical. In September 2015, Murat Karayilan said, "Our revolution for the victory of the Kurdish nation passes through an important stage of history...This stage we are at now, it is a stage of Freedom of Kurdistan; because of this we need national unity more than at any other time." He continues, "You nominated me [referring to his nomination as an Executive Council member of the KNC, or Kurdistan National Congress], as you thought I deserve to be a member of KNC, I promise you in struggling for freedom of Kurdistan I must be one of the Apo [Ojlan] Guerrilla. I should apply the principles of democratic unity of a nation for a free and democratic Kurdistan. With all my effort and power, I struggle against the occupation policy of the Turkish state [emphasis mine]...In an important situation like this, we need unity more than at any other time. I believe that for the victory of our nation, we need national unity; the KNC is playing a big role [in this]."

In my opinion, these remarks do not serve the Kurdish question at all. He challenges Ojlan, as he is very much opposed to his plan, principles and his solution for the Kurdish problem in each part of Kurdistan.

The phrases 'unity of the Kurdish people' and 'unity of nation' are nothing more than myths—they refer to other leaders' national political parties in Kurdistan. Anyone who is aware of the history of the Kurdish people can easily see that this nation never had and never will achieve unity. All nations consist of classes, each of which represents its own interests. Because of the disputes between them, they cannot achieve unity. In addition, forming different political parties with different leaders and their greed for power not only hampers attempts at unification, it breaks the nation down further.

Karayilan's remarks are against Ojlan's ideas and those of his master Bookchin regarding democratic confederalism, decentralism, non-hierarchy and unity with others regardless of their differences. Karayilan's ideas about the nation-state and national freedom contradict Ojlan's ideas, which are anti-state and more democratic.

On December 30, 2015, in his interview with Rojnews, Karayilan reassured us about what he had said in September. He said, "The struggle in Bakur is a national struggle and all the forces in Kurdistan must support it because this struggle is for all Kurds. We are hoping the politicians in Bashur (Iraqi Kurdistan) will support Bakur better."

Karayilan either talks politics or is simply not aware of the reality of the situation or the attitude of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) towards the PKK, the PYD, Bakur and Rojava. Who conspired with Turkey and Qatar to bring Isis to Iraq and Kurdistan? Who embargoes Rojava? Who does not allow YPG and YPJ fighters, wounded in their fight with Isis, to be treated in their hospitals under KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) control? Who does not allow the bodies of YPG, YPJ, and Guerrilla fighters to be sent back to Rojava and Bakur through their borders?

Who does not let people from Bashur and Rojhalat (the Iranian part of Kurdistan) cross the border into Rojava? Who is continuously in conspiracy with Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the US against the PKK and PYD? Is not the answer to all these questions, “the KRG”? Does Karayilan not see that just a few months ago Turkey, with the support of the KRG, brought a huge number of soldiers and powerful military forces to Sinjar, close to Mosul? Who gave permission to Turkey to set up a few military bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, to protect and defend Barzani against the PKK? Who is supporting Isis and Turkey by selling them very cheap oil? Who settled over 4,000 companies from Turkey in Iraqi Kurdistan for their own interests and not for the Kurdish people in Iraq? And finally, who are those people who have meetings – one day in the US, next day in the Gulf Countries and another day in some other western country – on how to eliminate the PKK and the fighters in Rojava? Again, is it not the KRG?

In addition to the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party), other powerful organisations share power in the KRG. They are Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Movement for Change (Goran), plus a couple of Islamic organisations. How can Karayilan demand unity from them? True, Goran has not been in power since October 12, 2015, but it never supported Bakur or Rojava practically. And the PUK is less guilty than the KDP, but it has not really supported either Rojava or Bakur either.

Doubtless the political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, including the KDP, are very clever. They have their reasons for not supporting either movement. Forget about the bloody history between the PKK and them (the PUK and KDP) at the end of the twentieth century. They do not want to support the sort of movement that aims to bring a brand-new model of popular power into the region, because this would mean digging a grave for themselves.

Selahattin Demirtas, during his trip to the US at the beginning of December 2015, told a large meeting in Washington, “We are not perfect, but I can say we have progressed toward achieving national unity. From Mahabad to Qamishli, Erbil and Sina [Kurdish towns in three parts of Kurdistan], we are all going in one direction. In my opinion, in this century we have arrived at a great position, in order to have our own seat among prestigious UN family and to live as a state.”

Obviously Demirtas here did not talk as a co-president of the HDP or as a citizen of Turkey, as he claimed to be during both elections in 2015; in fact he was talking like Barzani. He forgot that his aim in Bakur is to establish not a Kurdish nation-state but people’s self-rule, or democratic confederalism. His goal should not be to wave the Kurdish flag and wish the Kurdish state to be among the ‘happy family of the UN’. He should know better and remember that the UN never, ever condemns Turkey for its treatment to Demirtas’s own Kurdish nation.

And what ‘unity’ was he talking about?! The fact that a few thousand Kurdish people have been taking part in both movements, who come from the other parts of Kurdistan, does not mean that the national unity of the Kurdish people has been achieved. A few hundred foreign fighters, if not thousands, are already among the YPG and the PKK Guerrilla; what does Demirtas say about them? And also, what does he say about the many hundreds of Arabs, Assyrians, Christians, even Turkish and the others among the YPG and the YPJ?

### **3. The PKK’s and PYD’s diplomatic relationship with the KRG, especially the KDP**

The bloody conflict between the PKK and the Kurdish forces in Iraqi Kurdistan dates, at least, back to the beginning of the 1990s. In the past, few if any forces or political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan liked the PKK. True, at present, the relationship of the PKK and the PYD with the Islamic political parties and Goran is not as bloody as that between the KDP and the PUK. However, that does not mean they are less dangerous than the KDP and PUK to them.

The KDP considers the PKK its arch-enemy, more than any other force or government in this world. It brings forces of the state of Turkey to Kurdistan, opens military bases for them and co-operates with Isis in order to defeat the PKK, the YPG and the YPJ. The KDP does not even allow any serious demos or protests against the government of Turkey. Recently at the demo in Erbil, when one of the organisers tried to read a statement that condemned Turkey's brutality against the Kurdish people in Bakur's towns and cities, the KDP's police banned the reading. What better support and friendship could the KRG have offered Turkey? In my Rojava report of June 2014, I mentioned the major dispute and the bloody history between the PKK and the PDK; I do not want to repeat myself here.

Surely both the PKK and the PYD know more than we do about the KDP's agreements with Turkey, the US and some of the Western states against them. In fact, they might have official documents as well. But the problem with the PKK and the PYD is that the relationship with the KDP has been fruitless, has achieved nothing; in fact, it causes them problems. For instance, Salih Muslim visited the grave of the senior Barzani, Mustafa Barzani, for no reason. And also the PYD invited Barzani to attend its conference last year in Qamishli. He turned down the invitation and sent somebody else on behalf of himself, someone who has no personality, no dignity and no power. This means doing 'black politics' rather than general politics, and the majority of us, as Kurdish people, interpreted this as humiliating the PYD and the rest.

The KDP does not deserve to have any relationship with the PKK or the PYD. Obviously I am not in favour of launching a war against the KDP. I just wish to say that the PKK and the PYD, instead of having a relationship with the KDP, should have a policy of "no war, no peace", much like the PYD policy toward Assad's regime. The PKK and the PYD should have left people in Iraqi Kurdistan to work on isolating the KDP and weakening its power.

In Rojava, the disputes and the problems between the PKK and the PYD on one side, and with the PDK on the other, have penetrated to the other Kurdish political parties (ENKS), the Syrian Kurdish National Council for Kurdish Opposition parties, the Tev-Dem (the Movement for a Democratic Society), and the Democratic Self-Administration (DSA). Obviously, this is to be expected because of major differences between the PKK and the KDP. They have two very different strategies and want two different futures. We all can see that the PYD is a close relative, so to speak, of the PKK; meanwhile most of the Kurdish political parties in the ENKS have been formed and are supported in every way by the KDP, and their plans and strategies for Rojava are not separate from the KDP's.

Last year, the talks and negotiations between the ENKS and the PYD and PKK finally reached a sort of compromise and agreement about the political seats in Rojava. I noticed a couple of things. First: Aldar Khalil, who is one of the main people from Tev-Dem and the PYD, represented the movement in Rojava. In making the agreement, he did not go back to local groups and the House of People that formed the Tev-Dem; nor did he announce a referendum. Instead, he offered 40% of the seats to the ENKS. Of course, that happened after consultation with other leaders in both political parties, the PKK and the PYD. Neither direct democracy nor indirect democracy was used during the process of drafting the agreement. If it had been implemented, it would certainly have affected the future of Rojava. For me, this was a major setback from the principles of Rojava's revolution. The Tev-Dem is the only hope, in my opinion, for Rojava, but it is completely marginalised. Second, this compromise and the courtesy they showed to the KDP would have worked better and been more effective if they had extended it directly to the ENKS. That also means considering the ENKS as a partner of peace and war in Rojava, whilst it was undermining

the KDP. I believe that direct negotiations with the ENKS would be better and would save time and money, and avoid confusion. The PKK and the PYD should look at the ENKS in a more realistic way, give it more weight and consideration—whether it is small or big, it can still create many problems for the PYD and the PKK. The ENKS has so many choices due to the existence of many enemies of the PYD and the PKK. It could easily become a part of one of those enemies the KDP, Assad, Turkey, Iran or any other regional country, and work with them against Rojava.

#### **4. The mistakes of the PKK and falling in the trap of the state of Turkey**

In 2013, when the so-called peace process began, we did not know that Turkey—under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its leader, Erdogan—does not want peace with the Kurdish people but just wanted to pass the time. However, by the beginning of 2015, we should have realised this. Then as now, it is very clear that the peace process will succeed only in the way that Ojalan and a few more people in the PKK envisaged it. They knew that shifting the war from the mountains to the cities would not get the Kurdish movement anywhere. They knew that a ceasefire, even if it is just for killing time, is still better than war.

Ojalan spent so much time, made a great effort and took so many steps to defuse all the tactics from the state of Turkey. He managed to take the Kurdish question from an internal issue to a big issue on the table of some powerful countries. He managed to take the PKK movement forward from a closed nationalist political movement to an exemplary social movement, to a movement that is anti-state and anti-authoritarian. By doing this, he managed to bring millions of people around the world to support, and offer solidarity with, Bakur's movement, and he has managed to do even more.

Alas, if the situation continues as it is now, all these efforts and the work that Ojalan has done will be wasted, and the movement will go back to its level in the 1980s and early 1990s. If this happens, it will also be the beginning of the defeat of Rojava.

The ceasefire and the transfer the struggle to the towns and cities of Turkey, and the transformation of the movement into a social revolution would cut off the aggressive arms of Erdogan and his AKP. It has put the AKP under much pressure both inside and outside Turkey and has put the state of Turkey's polices under scrutiny.

However, the state of Turkey and its head, Erdogan, have never seriously wanted to resolve the issue. In the meantime, it was very difficult for them to go back to war with the PKK easily. They always looked for an excuse to launch an attack on the PKK and the rest of the Kurdish people in Bakur. They also knew that the route that the PKK has taken – announcing a ceasefire and being ready to reach a peaceful solution – was the way to win the struggle. Therefore Erdogan, with the help of the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT), tried to find a way to involve the PKK in starting a war. He also knew that this is the only way to defeat Rojava, or at least to make it so weak that it would accept any compromise.

Regrettably, the PKK has done what exactly the state of Turkey wanted. In the summer of 2015 it killed a few members of the police, although the PKK has denied that. However, this provided the state with a justification to kill and arrest of many innocent people. At the same time, the state's fighter jets crossed the Iraqi border and, over the period of a week, bombarded the Guerrillas in the mountains and destroyed a few villages in Iraqi Kurdistan, killing many civilians (including women and children) and also killing many fighters from the PKK Guerrilla. Later on, the state of Turkey announced that the peace process was over.

After killing more than 130 people in the terrorist attack in Ankara and the state's brutality against people there, the PKK, instead of working to expand its social revolution to other parts

of Turkey, announced “resistant but in the form of announcing self-rule administration”. How can you set up a “self-rule administration” in a climate of war and terror? If “self-rule” is the people’s self-rule, the people themselves must decide and do it by using direct democracy, not by a decision made by the Guerrillas or by a tiny minority of people!!! Obviously, announcing self-rule in this situation was not a choice of the people, and has also given an excuse to the state to kill more people and use more terror. In addition, Erdogan could tell people in Turkey that the “Kurdish people want divide Turkey, they want separation”, especially because, at the time, a general election process was under way.

Worse still, on December 24 and 25, in the town of Nosubin, Butane, a few people announced the formation of the “Civil Party” in Cizre. Soon after the announcement, the establishment of the “Town Protection Unit” was announced, too – by showing pictures of a few young people in social media flashing their guns and grenades as happy and very good news. In my opinion, this was a very big mistake, and I have no doubt that the state of Turkey would have been happy to buy it for millions of pounds.

On the other side, someone else was going to make a decision, alone, for a whole town, without thinking of the consequences of her decision and without going back to her people who elected her. On December 30 Rojnews reported that Gültan Kisanek declared, “If the state arrests our co-mayor of our municipalities, then I will announce self-rule.”

At present, there is talk about the continuation of this sort of resistance, and in the very near future, the Guerrillas will enter the cities to start fighting in the heart of Turkey’s towns. The above has been confirmed by one of the commanders, Dalal Amud, and is said to prevent attacks by the forces of Turkey’s government. Rojnews reported on January 2 that Dalal Amud, in her interview with Firat News, said, “If, in 2016, the attacks increased [referring to attacks by Turkey], we shall put intervention in cities on our agenda.”

These sorts of tactics are, in my opinion, very dangerous and suicidal. The only person to defuse them and to put the PKK back in the right direction is Ojalan, and he is not allowed to see anybody or to send any messages out. I believe that the tactic of banning him from seeing other people is deliberate. They know Ojalan could instruct his followers not to fight in the streets, not to destroy the social revolution that may end up destroying what has been achieved.

### **5. Getting close to the US and Western Countries**

The US and the Western countries are dark forces; in at least the past century they have hardly helped any movement or state unless doing so would benefit them. In analysing any movement to see whether it actually reflects the interest of vast majority of its people, we need only identify the attitudes of the US and other Western countries toward it, and then we can tell. If they support the movement, it should be questionable. If they are against it, then we need to look into it closely before saying anything.

Obviously, this formula does not apply to the terrorist groups, since we simply do not know what is going on behind the scenes and what opinions, exactly, these countries hold. It is very normal for them to call the groups terrorists today and “freedom fighters” tomorrow; to fight them forcefully and even brutally today and negotiate with them tomorrow. The language of politics knows only vested interests and nothing else.

Compared to the help the US and other Western countries give to reactionary and terrorist states, their help and support for Rojava is nothing. But still, why do they give it? The reason is that to defeat Rojava by military force would not be easy at all. Any country that fought Rojava’s movement would face a huge protest, not just by its own people but also by people



from other countries. So the best way to defeat it is to support it, and thereby to contain it and tame it, without sacrificing any of their soldiers. Once this has been done, they can occupy it economically.

What I see from the interviews of the PKK and PYD leaders and their attitudes is that they are very anxious and are rushing to get closer to the US and other Western countries.

The US support for the PYD is now much greater than it was during the battle for Kobane, and the support is direct rather than through the KRG. A few months ago the US sent 50 advisers and experts to the YPG and YPJ. The US support for Rojava was planned very well, but was slow: first, because of Turkey; second, because of the Gulf countries and the reaction of the Sunni people; and third, currently, the future direction of Rojava is not clear to them. (It is not clear to us, either.)

Salih Muslim in his interview with the Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI) on September 2, 2015, was asked: What is the purpose of the buffer zone that the Turkish government wants? What is the US administration's position on it? He said, "The US has repeatedly stressed its rejection of the buffer zone, and we trust the statements by the US". This answer is very naive. If this is his true opinion, he knows neither the US nor the importance of Turkey, the Gulf countries and the Sunni people in general, to the US. If he thinks this is a good diplomatic answer, not many Kurdish people believe it. The US administration does not believe it either, because the US knows about the closeness of the PKK to the PYD, and the PKK is, for them, still a terrorist organization.

In the same interview, Muslim was asked: How do you explain your relationship with the US? , He said, "This is a positive step. We seek to expand our relations with the US politically and diplomatically, and we hope that we will succeed in doing so." He was then asked: What is your message to the American people and their government? His response was, "America is a superpower that fosters democracy globally, and tries to develop and disseminate it throughout the world, and the American people have their own standards and fundamental principles for democracy". That this is the opinion of the best PYD leader about the US is a disaster. In the past hundred years or more, the US has not supported democracy. In fact, it has fought brutally against people who stand for democracy by killing thousands of them in different countries around world. The US is the most friendly administration to reactionary and dictatorship states in the world. Muslim's answer contains no truth at all; it is covering up and defending the brutality of the US state in the world, and especially what the US has done, and still does, directly and indirectly, against his own nation, the Kurdish people.

On December 7, 2015, Cemil Bayik, the main leader of PKK after Ojalan, was interviewed by Mahmut Hamsic. Kurdish Leader Bayik: We are neither on America nor ...

In response of one of the questions, he said, "We are neither on America's nor on Russia's side. We are a third force there, we represent a third line. When I say 'we' I mean the Kurds in Rojava". What did they say? "They said, we will recognize whoever recognizes our status, and we will form an alliance with them. Until now no-one has officially recognized Rojava. Therefore, the Kurds there cannot be on the side of America or Russia. There is a relationship. Whoever wants to fight ISIS (Daesh), we will fight with them". While he is the person who best understands Ojalan's ideas, democratic confederalism, and to a certain extent Bookchin's ideas too, I believe he could have done much better in this interview and a couple of previous ones. He could have explained, very well and clearly, his and the PKK's opinions, by carefully choosing his words on the events, and avoid embarrassing himself when responding to a sensitive question in the way that he did.

## **6 . The different opinions and the paradox about the future economy in Rojava**

The basis of Rojava's social revolution, for me, is its economic revolution and its cultural revolution. From there, the revolution can be extended to other sectors, such as education and politics, both of which are strongly connected with the economy and culture.

A social revolution supports changing the negative sides of the existing cultures to match the natural/organic society in which people live communally and work collectively. So it is important, from the beginning, to have a clear plan and idea of what sort of economy we want in the end. Creating communes, and working and living together on the land, in neighborhoods and in workplaces– this is the basis for socialising the economy and for people living together as communities.

It is true that Rojava has no advanced economy; instead it has war and an embargo. These issues co-exist with other social problems, and international support and solidarity are insufficient. No doubt all of these played, and still play, a big role in forming the economy in Rojava.

However, people should not take the issue of economy lightly, and they should make a proper plan. They also should avoid contradictions in talking about it.

There are more than 109 communes in Jazeeira Canton. They can be made more effective by trying to move them forward. For instance, they could establish large collective kitchens in the neighborhoods, in the factories, on the land where people work, and in every other place of work and study, as well as in public services.

By now, a plan for people to work on the land collectively and to distribute the products according to people's needs should be in place. However, consider what Dr Ahmet Yusuf, the economics minister in Afrin Canton, said in his interview with the Huffington Post on December 18, 2015: "We will develop an economy based on agriculture, that is to say production. We will base this mode of production on a foundation by which all the peoples of the region will be included and benefit from it." Dr. Yusuf also told the PKK-linked Kurdish outlet ANF News last December, "We will encourage everyone to work their own lands based on the needs of the community." He continued, "Wealthy investors are welcome to contribute, by putting capital into various citizens' efforts to live off the land", adding, "since private enterprise is still part of the economy." But he wants them to know that "we will not allow them the opportunity to exploit the community and people or monopolise. We will succeed in this," he said, "because there is no other model left to try on Earth. Because this model is the model by which the history of humanity will be brought back to life."

On January 8, 2015, during the unfolding revolution in Rojava, the historian Dylan Murphy asked Özgür Amed, a journalist and researcher: The Unfolding Revolution in Rojava "The capitalist world is still recovering from the 2008 economic crisis and wealth inequality is increasing in many places around the globe. What economic alternatives are being proposed in Rojava?" Amed replied, "The economic pillar has been an essential part of the Rojava revolution! It defends an autonomous economic model and is working to put it into practice. Capitalism has surrounded everyone and everything, and in a century in which it is difficult to breathe, and where we are seemingly bereft of alternatives, an exit is now being discovered through an alternative economic model and a communal economy."

Then Amed referred to Dr. Ahmet Yusuf's remarks about the 'Democratic Autonomous Economy': "We take as a principle the protection and defense of natural resources. What we mean by defense is not defense in a military sense, but the self-defense against the exploitation and oppression which society now faces. There are many obstacles to restructuring the communal economy

in Rojava. Systems that take capitalist systems as their reference have attempted to obstruct our progress in the economic as well as the social spheres. We ourselves take the communal economy as a founding principle. We are working to create a system which combines anti-liberalism, ecological sustainability, and moral common property with communal and cultural production.”

Özgür Amed continued, “This revolution is developing cooperatives based on a social economy as its economic alternative. For example, any companies that will come to Rojava will take a place in the service of these cooperatives.”

Obviously, Dr Yusuf’s opinions and ideas about Rojava’s economy in the first interview are much better and clearer than in the latest one. However, the question arises here: How can you convince a company to abandon seeking profit? As long as a company’s purpose is business, and business means making money, no company will participate in the co-operatives if it does not make money.

### **7. Breaching and abusing the principles of human rights**

There has been so much propaganda against the PYD and its breaches and abuses of human rights by the media, including the KRG, and also by human rights organisations. The PYD has been accused of restricting freedom, arresting people from oppositions, treating prisoners badly, and using violence against them. Recently, the YPG was even accused of using violence against Arab villagers who were under the control of Isis before. Worse, we were told that they moved entire villages, due to their co-operation with Isis.

No doubt that the people who are at war with others, struggling for power with guns, create a climate that breaches and abuses human rights, and these can become a normal practices. These practices are also usually used against anybody in opposition organizations who struggles for power, or against somebody who simply has differences. Under such circumstances, most of the above accusations can be moved from doubt to certainty. History has proved that.

Since September of last year, when the PYD introduced a new primary school curriculum, some people from different religions, different backgrounds, different organisations, and some Arabs as well, have shown concern about the new scheme. They think that “New Kurdish-language primary school curricula introduced by the PYD-led Kurdish authorities in northern Syria last month are generating controversy for being too ideological and “prioritizing a single view over all others.” They believe there is not much difference between the education under Assad’s regime and that under the democratic self-administration. “Just like the Syrian government’s textbooks,” Kadar Ahmad, a Kobani-based Kurdish activist, told Syria Direct, the texts used in the new curricula “prioritize a single view over all others, the difference being that these curricula adopt Ocalan’s thought rather than Baathist ideas.” <http://syriadirect.org/news/new-pyd-curriculum-in-northern-syria-reveals-ideological-linguistic-fault-lines/>

Obviously we do not know how much of this is true, but it is certainly very difficult for the above groups to approve the current system in Rojava and to apply the new education system. The Syrian government at the time permitted private schools for Christians and Assyrians for different reasons; therefore these people now think they are deprived of the privileges they had had under Assad’s regime. I recognize the wish of the PYD and the DSA to bring back the private schools, and some parents do not want their children’s study covered by the current education system. However, the PYD and the DSA should have had more patience. They could have spent more time in dialogue and in meetings with parents in order to convince them not to withdraw their children from the normal schools.

In Qamishli, the organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) thinks there have been violations of human rights, extending to forced eviction and destruction of homes and properties of non-Kurdish people. The Assyrian International News Agency, on November 2, 2015, reported on the confiscation of property, military conscription and church school curricula. "Sixteen Assyrian and Armenian organizations have issued a statement protesting Kurdish expropriation of private property in the Hasaka province of Syria. The statement accuses the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian wing of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), of human rights violations, expropriation of private property, illegal military conscription and interference in church school curricula."

<http://www.aina.org/news/20151102170051.htm>

No matter what the situation in Rojava is, people there must have their say, must be allowed to show their differences, and must have full rights to criticise, to protest and to organise their own demonstrations, whether as individuals or as part of a political organisation. And also, there is no justification for moving Arabs from their villages. They should avoid repeating the same policy that Assad and the former Iraqi government used against the Kurdish people in both Syria and Iraq.

The PYD and the YPG should regard HRW as a protector and not as an enemy. They should see that it is there to protect their reputation by stopping them or at least by bringing to their attention any breaches or violations of human rights. They should encourage HRW to register the abuses and the abusers so that they can tackle this horrible issue.

The PYD, instead of making compromises with the KRG and other forces in the region, should make a compromise with the opposition in Rojava. The PYD should let them enjoy their rights rather than persecute them, ban them and push them to get closer to the KRG or Turkey or any other regional government. Ignoring and marginalizing the opposition will cause a lot of problems for the PYD, the PKK and the YPG.

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Zaher Baher  
Our attitude towards Rojava must be critical solidarity  
January 30, 2016

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