



Anarchism in Turkey and Rojava

Revolutionary Anarchist Action (DAF)
on anarchism in the Middle East

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A Response to Rojava: An anarcho-syndicalist perspective

Huseyin Civan (DAF member)

Friday November 14, 2014

The effects of social revolutions are not limited by the effect of struggle against political and economical powers in the geographical region where the revolution happens. It's important to see their effect on other different regions along with the intellectual and practical changes this effect brings. Being talked about with Kobanê Resistance ,Rojava Revolution gets more important now to see this effect more clearly.

The reaction and attack of the state and capitalism against what's happening in Rojava, is expected at this point. However, we need to turn our face to the internal debates in social opposition at the same time. It's necessary to emphasize that such debates are an important resort for understanding what the effect of Rojava is.

Since the start of this process, anarchist comrades' behaviors towards understanding Rojava and taking up with the resistance has been quite important for remembering the international solidarity, which we aren't familiar to see in such an organized manner. Again we have experienced that solidarity is our greatest weapon.

This manner of solidarity that was created between anarchists inevitably made the resistance in Kobanê a headline especially among anarchists all around the world.

The paper "Rojava: An anarcho-syndicalist point of view" which was published on several different sites is one of the reflections of this headline. This evaluation of the paper especially aims to correct information about Rojava Revolution and Kobanê Resistance, instead of pointing out positive and negative sides of the paper and making a simple criticism. Considering different comments may form with the different perspectives of anarchist organizations in different geographical regions; I focused the criticism of paper on the matter of incomplete evaluation of Kurdish freedom struggle and Rojava Revolution. Political criticism against a community which is in a life or death struggle under war conditions can't be made ignoring this condition. Even so if said criticism has certain prejudices and was formed with sharp generalization. And of course, if a huge people's movement is evaluated with a degrading manner...

First of all it's necessary to state that forming a solidarity relationship with Rojava Revolution and Kobanê Resistance is not an emotional relation, unlike comrades with an "anarcho-syndicalist perspective" emphasize. Because anarchist organizations don't base their solidarity relationships on "sympathy". These relationships mostly form considering a political perspective and strategies planned to realize this perspective. Thereby, solidarity and taking up with a struggle aren't far from objectivity.

In different parts of the paper, PKK criticism is tried to be based on party's political history and with criticism such as short-coming implementation of "libertarian municipality", incomplete state of political transformation and having nationalistic roots; current condition and perspective of Kurdish Movement is being left under prejudice. While doing all these, prejudice is being based on incomplete information, consciously or unconsciously. No one claims Kurdish Freedom Movement is an anarchist movement. Thereby, the practices which are claimed to be short-coming or flawed should be evaluated considering this fact. On the other hand, a people's movement that value "criticism of the state and the capitalism" so much can't be overlooked by anarchists. This matter can't only be tied to Bookchinist "libertarian municipalism". Movement has referenced many different comrades from Bakunin to Kropotkin on its theoretical relations with anarchism, and could interpret the state problem with a wide perspective. On the other hand, realizing this idea led to a practice which is quite libertarian and non-central. I think this part is very important. This information is based not on quotations from articles and books, but on mutual observation of political organizations that share common ground for struggle.

The condition of Rojava is not as such because of Assad leaving the region or his claimed agreements with global powers. Great social transformation that happened in Rojava two and a half years ago, happened in a conjuncture where political activity forced Middle-East to choose governance of one of two opposing sides (coup-supporting seculars - conservative democrats). Rojava, when "springs" turned into winter in Middle-East region, is people not fitting into these two sides and creating their own solution.

While life is being re-built in Rojava, the non-central structure of social mechanisms being created, insistent emphasis on statelessness, organization of the production-consumption-distribution relations in a way as far from capitalism as possible, self-organization being the warrantor of social process, communes in three different cantons shaping the operation of communes with independent decision processes are undeniably important in this age. Especially, how could an anarchist deny the fact that this process is a promising experience for multiplying with similar examples in different geographical regions?

Let's repeat for comrades that insist on not comprehending. This is not an effort to claim it is an anarchist process. However, the anarchist characteristics of the process in Rojava would make anarchists who struggle for a social revolution happy. This happiness is far from the romanticism that's criticized in the paper, it's about understanding that our political goals and strategies are applicable in such a system, in such an age.

No one can claim that practices of stateless people are negative for anarchists who struggle for a social revolution. Such practices in different geographical regions may develop under their genuine conditions. Claiming these genuine struggles are not adequate with anarchist principles and reducing their importance is exhibiting an understanding of anarchism that rely on theoretical arrogance lacking practice. Another thing in the paper that's worth pointing at, is the authenticity of references. It's interesting to reference the expressions of an online group just because they have Kurdistan and anarchist in their name. It's not about the expressions of comrades being right or wrong. It's a problematic question that what political fact the group bases their expressions on, not showing any political activity in Kurdistan

region while theoretically criticizing the Kurdish Freedom Movement on a practical level.

While the women's movement in Kurdistan is directly related with the freedom movement, comments that claim the women's movement is apart from this integrity or even against it, are twisting of information. It's a logical flaw to criticize movement as patriarchic while emphasizing on the importance of women's movement in the struggle. Moreover, the logical flaw continues when the claim of Ocalan being a rapist is confirmed through quotes from state's anti-propaganda websites. Another example of references is about "kurds wanting war to expel arabs". When you cherry pick a speech disregarding its context, you can use it to support any context of your own. It's clear that the topic of the referred news is about settlers moved by Assad to change the demographic structure of region towards his assimilative goals. Just like Israeli settlers.

Causes can be invented when one tries to be over suspicious. However, it's important to question the relation of these causes with actual facts. It's a mistake to try to define Kurdish Freedom Movement as a nationalist movement. This definition and the likes, overlook the transformation of the movement and claim that it continues its old political structure. A perspective that has no knowledge of the practices of process, and has only criticizing articles as a source of information, is extremely problematic. Because a massive part of these critics are worded by statist mindset and its extensions. A healthy criticism can be made by observing and experiencing the political practices. Every criticism that lacks a vision of geographical region and practicality, carry the danger of falling into orientalism.

We spoke before about the process in Rojava and the movement not being anarchist. Another lacking thing is evaluation of Kurdish people's freedom struggle apart from the historical fact that they have been struggling for centuries in Mesopotamian region. Those who draw away from the truth for ideological correctness and devaluate people's centuries long struggle, are betraying their revolutionary responsibilities and should pay attention to whose front they are placing themselves at.

To perceive the classes in a shallow vision, and trying to interpret social struggles just with economical struggles is to create a hierarchy between the struggles of the oppressed. An anarchist point of view that limits the oppressed to workers and disregards other relations of power contradicts the history of anarchist movement. Revolutionary history of anarchism is full of economical, political and social struggles of the oppressed. To overlook the effect of movement on people's freedom movements from Europe to Far East Asia in different centuries, to exclude the practical feeding of this effect to class struggles in South America, is to ignore the integrated structure of anarchist movement.

We are not fortunetellers, we can't possibly know what will happen in Rojava a month or a year from now. We can't know that this social transformation which not only gives us hope as revolutionaries that struggle in a geographically close region, but also feeds our struggle in the regions that we struggle in, would move towards a positive or negative future. But we are revolutionary anarchists. We can't just sit

aside, watch what's happening and comment; we take part in social struggles and take action for an anarchist revolution.

Long live the Rojava Revolution!
Long live the Kobanê Resistance!
Long live the Revolutionary Anarchism!

An Interview to a DAF militant about the solidarity for Rojava social process

By Bruno Lima Rocha

Sunday January 11, 2015

Introduction: Since the Kobanê siege started I have been dedicated several hours per week to understand and divulgate as much as possible about this social revolution initiated in a combination of Apoism and the Syrian Civil War. As a militant, I always have been involved in international solidarity. As an Arab descendent, I always have been trying to find a reliable left-wing force combining direct action and internal democracy. As a scholar and a Professor of Geopolitics studying the region for more than 25 years, Rojava is a dream coming true. Here I start the first of some interviews to organizations with real experience in this process and on the ground. This one I'm talking to Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet (DAF, or Revolutionary Anarchist Action). They have been very active in this activity and understand in details the whole Kurdish process, both in Rojava and inside the Turkish State frontiers.

E&A - It is possible to understand the PKK (PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanî, Kurdistan Workers' Party) as a politico-military force remodeled from the thought of their historic leader (and stuck with life sentence) being transferred organically for the whole organization? Hence we have two questions in sequence: you can imagine the reproduction of these ideas beyond a certain cult of personality around the image of Abdullah Ocalan (Apo)? And, it will be possible to universalize the proposals of the PKK-KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan, Group of Communities in Kurdistan) beyond national issue not resolved yet of the Kurds?

DAF - We have to see the issue as Kurdish Freedom Movement. PKK is one organization of Kurdish people who has been giving struggle not just for 30 years but hundred years. Especially after 2000s party has changed its ideology, strategy and character. So the critics about the movement have always same habit to take PKK as the same party as 80s-90s. Just for remember, PKK claimed a freedom not just for Kurdish people but a freedom for all people who are oppressed in Middle East. Think about Rojava, PYD (Democratic Union Party, in Kurdish: Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat), is struggling not just for the Kurds, Ezidis, Turkmens, Shias, Alawis whom Daesh (ISIS or ISIL or IS, Islamic State) want to destroy.

E&A - Is observable a strategic problem for Rojava revolution. I do explain: the live border and that one which is possible to be used as sanctuary is with the KRG (Kurdish Regional Government in Irak, besides being the epicenter of the war is in Kobanê. It is observed that if there is no reinforcement of peshmerges (professional KRG's forces), probably the anti-Isis US-led coalition would not be bombarding the jihadists positions. Soon, the Alliance between PKK-PYD and the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party, Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê, or PDK) and its coalition with Massoud Barzani ahead of KRG cabinet could imply an inevitable approach to the West? It is possible to survive as a revolutionary process if this depends on military aid physically KRG and the West?

DAF - We have to see the role of peshmerges. It has been nearly one and half month that they did not do anything for Rojava. When YPG (People's Protection Units, in Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) and YPJ (Women's Protection Units, in Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê), the self-defense organizations of Rojava people got 60% control of Kobanê, the forces of Barzani decided to come to help. It is obvious that this

was a strategic action for Barzani. Barzani declared as there was no Rojava Revolution two years before and we have to see this, US and other western countries do not support Kobanê resistance. After Rojava Revolution, the western powers did not accept the political existence of PYD or the cantons of Rojava. So the best solution for them is Barzani who has no problem with capitalist or statist politics. Moreover, Barzani's KDP is the brother party of Recep Erdogan's AKP (Justice and Development Party, Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). Under these circumstances, people in Rojava need any kind of support. This does not mean that they can get help from any capitalist or statist power. But it is like, YPG-YPJ is giving struggle against ISIS, Al-Nusrat Front (an affiliated Al-Qaeda group)..., but also giving strategic struggle against Turkey, Esad's Syria (Bashir Al Assad), Barzani's Kurdistan and all capitalist powers.

E&A - Still within the strategic theme; by all indications, the Government of Turkey is favoring the supply lines and leaving the ISIS to strengthen within the territory under the control of the Turkish army. Apparently, this is caused because the realistic calculation of Ankara and the AKP government, considering to be less dangerous a proposition of "caliphate" – or the return of the Ummah – compared to an idea of Kurdish separatism, or even political autonomy for Rojava inside the failure State of Syria? From the Turkish position, how to evaluate the dispute between the other States operating through Sunni Jihadists, like Saudi Arabia and Qatar?

DAF - In the mainstream media, it is hard to find some of the news about Turkish support to ISIS. It is not just weapon support, nor it is a neutral position. As you have stated, there is an obvious logistic support from Sunni countries to ISIS, but the thing that we should never forget the hidden relations of ISIS with capitalist western powers. The scene is clear that a terrorist Islamic group is strengthening the hands of US, especially in Middle East.

E&A - Getting into the theme of the Syrian civil war, what can be seen today is a growing war between Sunnis and Shiites, and going together, a war between ISIS (and before Front Al-Nusra Front) and the attempted conquest of Kobanê. Considering this reality, what would be the role of the Free Syrian Army today (FSA)? This force still has some protective power – as the Qatar-or was dropped on condition of a secondary YPG ally? We can consider Qatar the major funder of the FSA? And, maybe that's why, whereas both FSA as YPG are also opponents of the Assad regime, Damascus and its allies (financiers) preferred to release the area of Aleppo and Raqqa for ISIS operations, allowing the Sunni Jihadists advance against Rojava?

DAF - As we stated before, some of the strategic actions like struggle against ISIS with FSA does not represent the real political view of PYD. So this kind of cooperation is the result of the circumstances in Syria and Rojava. The cooperation between the organizations and groups shouldn't be taken as the results of the real policies of the organizations and groups. The war in Rojava, more in Syria still continues, so it is hard for us to determine the allies. It is far away from the solidarity of the revolutionaries for Kobanê Resistance and Rojava Revolution.

E&A - I understand, even at a distance glance that for the States of Turkey, Syria (what was left of this) and Iran, a Western Kurdistan with political autonomy and a society working in secular and egalitarian basis implies an insoluble problem. Would be the proposal of PYD not formally separate from Syria, but obtain a status of an autonomy Federated policy on Syria, as well as a future rearrangement with Iraq and the Government of Irbil (KRG's capitol). Turkey would tolerate a similar Statute, even though it has the second largest army of NATO and the biggest contingent on a State with the major population being Islamic? If the Turkish Kurdistan received such status, what

would prevent a Confederation with the Syrian Kurdistan? And, if so, what would be the reaction of the KRG and the coalition of the right wing and pro-Western Kurdish parties, like the KDP?

DAF - These scenarios are being talked as the war in Syria has been finished. It is really hard to estimate how these wars shape the Middle East. Rojava's three cantons have declared their freedom nearly 2,5 years before without caring what will be the reaction of Esad, Erdogan or Barzani. Three of these declared that they did not recognize the self-governance of Rojava cantons. Moreover, they still do not talk the political existence of Rojava. Comrade, we have to see that, during these two years the states around Rojava have change their politics in their region with the decisive struggle of Rojava's free people. They try to find some ways to control the freedom of Rojava. The main scenario is Rojava will be a federation which is part of Esad's Syria. But which Syria we are talking about, what is the power of Esad in Syria or will be an Esad who leads Syria? The second scenario Rojava will be a part of Barzani's Kurdistan. That would be the aim of Barzani, but the principles that hold Kobanê against ISIS are not frightened ISIS but also Barzani. Because Rojava Revolution declared itself as an anticapitalist, antistatist, women and ecology centered revolution.

E&A - It would be interesting for the KRG that Washington no longer considers the PKK-HPG (People's Defense Force, in Kurdish: Hezen Parastina Gel) as a terrorist force? This would enable a request for freedom for Ocalan, reinforcing the leadership of this political force?

DAF - This is one of the constant political issues in Turkey. Kobanê Resistance and Rojava Revolution strength not just to position of the Kurds live in Rojava but also in Turkey, Iran and Iraq. So this occasion has some results in political, social and economic arena. But we have to keep in mind the political power of Erdogan's AKP which does not hesitate to express their ideas in international politics.

E&A - How do you project the existence of a legal sovereignty and political autonomy status to Rojava considering some fundamental themes like: movement of currency (what it would be like? would exists a Central Bank?); trade relations with other territories (for example, in the petroleum trade); belonging to a territorial Federation (as in a reorganized Syria or Federated to KRG); and what concrete measures would be instituted trough Democratic Confederalism with full territorial unity and existence of the three cantons?

DAF - 2,5 years before, after declaring the freedom of Rojava cantons; Rojava people started to organize the economy by instituting the collective lands to the people; open Mala Gels (House of People) and Mala Jins (House of Women) to organize society in a direct democratic way. These houses are the real political centers where people from that region discuss political and social issues together and decide what to do. They organize the juridical process with themselves without any court, any lawyer or judge. Social justice is not provided with any kind of central power like state. No school, but there is free knowledge sharing like Zapatistas Soil Universities.

We have to accept that Rojava Revolution is not an anarchist revolution. But there is no question mark about it is social revolution. The political existence of Rojava is not a part of Esad's Syria or part of Iraqi Kurdistan. We are talking about a federation which declared itself as anticapitalist. Now it is useless to be worry of the future of Rojava if they trade with capitalist or cooperate with states... Let's make bigger the revolutionary solidarity and let's take part in this social revolution, so that we don't have so many things to worry. As DAF, we have also mentioned the position of ours in a text about Kobanê Resistance; we are not fortunetellers that we don't guess the political position of Rojava after 10 years or 50 years. But we are revolutionary anarchist, we have to take part in the

social movements and shape the movements.

E&A - What would be the concrete results of the mass policies through KCK organizers and democratization proposals from the municipal policy autonomy in Turkish Kurdistan?

DAF - The real misunderstanding of international social opposition is to differentiate the policies of Kurdish Movement (HDP - Peoples' Democratic Party, in Turkish: Halkların Demokratik Partisi) or other institutions that are accepted by Turkish State; and PKK (which is referred as a terrorist organization by the state). The realization chance of the democratic institutions policies depend on the struggle of the Kurdish people which is referred as terrorism. So we have to understand the issue "struggle against Turkish State's assimilation politics" as a whole meaning. There is no movement, policy or institution which is expressed itself as away from the struggle of PKK and named itself as a part of this struggle. So the results of any policies depend of the success of Kurdish people organized struggle, PKK. This situation may be a part of another kind of political culture situated in Middle East far from European one.

E&A -DAF as an anarchist force do take part of some coordination of alliances with the KCK or the DTK (Democratic Society Congress, in Turkish: Demokratik Toplum Kongresi)? As anarchists, how do you evaluate these activities with other social forces? And, in this sense, how to assess the electoral participation of the Alliance BDP (Peace and Democracy Party, in Turkish: Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, in Kurdish: Partiya Aştî û Demokrasiyê), BDP /HDP?

DAF - Related with the answer of the question above, DAF take PKK as the real subject of this matter. Especially after the change in paradigm in 2000s, after Ocalan declared as PKK is not a Marxist-Leninist movement anymore and reference Bookchin, Bakunin and Kropotkin, it is impossible for DAF not to be interested with this change in theory. We have experienced the changes in practices day by day. Direct Democracy took an important place for this realization in politics. Although there are some critics from European anarchist as they were still a part of Marxist ideology, we are witnessing the changing not just in sharing the same political arena (that is struggle against the state), but we are witnessing the harmony of the theory and practice in Rojava Revolution. The institutions like KCK, DTK, DBP/HDP, these could be some strategies of movement in Parliament, juridical system... We can criticize these strategies but we do not take these institutions as they are other organizations who aims other policies. Like we do not vote for HDP of DBP, because we have other kind of strategy in parliamentary democracy, this doesn't make us to degrade these institutions with PKK.

E&A - Whereas the Democratic Confederalismo is inspired in anarchism, we assume that there is an approximation and sympathy between the anarchist ideas and the current thought of the Kurdish left. This assessment is correct? Could you specify in which sense?

DAF - As stated above, especially after 2000s new paradigm appeared in Kurdish Movement referenced especially Bookchin and Kropotkin, Bakunin (maybe Michael Albert in economy). So this is a good step for a popular movement. Kurdish people are giving struggle not just for 30 years, they are giving struggle for decades. For revolutionary anarchists, it is a good momentum for us, that organization of this liberation struggle referenced anarchism. It is a good time for us to socialize anarchism in the lands where people live without states for decades. A social revolution could be prepared just as if it got socialized. We, as DAF, are not anarchists just to write some texts and live anarchism in our closed groups as some comrades in Europe do. We aim social revolution, we are giving struggle in every meaning, so this is a good step for us to socialize anarchism.

E&A - Based on what we read, the DAF operates side by side with a front of pro-Rojava movements and as supporters of the Social Revolution in the region. This is generating an approximation of the Turkish left as a whole, may be marking a position strengthened between the pro-Kurdish social and political umbrella (DTK-KCK and legal political forces, DBP/HDP), leading the population to have an option in addition to the rivalry between the AKP and the Kemalists-Nationalists?

DAF – DAF is in solidarity with Rojava Revolution and Kobanê Resistance from the first day. Because, on 19th of July, the cantons of Rojava declared their independence against Esad's Syria, against ISIS, against Barzani and against all international economic and political powers that have goals in the region. DAF solidarity with the people of Rojava who are Kurds, Ezidi's, Shia's, Alawi's... because Rojava is a hope for the oppressed people living in Middle East and other parts of the world. Rojava shows that we manage to win against states, against capitalists.

Actually Rojava Revolution is like litmus paper for Turkish left. Because, some organizations and parties do not solidarity with revolution because of nationalistic views they got. Kurdish issue for social opposition in Turkish left is an important issue to see the effects of the state politics in socialism. Moreover, after the paradigm change in PKK, this situation makes some of socialist parties to hold off with Kurdish Movement. The behavior of anarchists in this manner is also important. We, as revolutionary anarchists coming from a tradition, where socialist did not even give importance to the liberation movements of the people in 3rd world countries but anarchist comrades constituted first liberation movements in Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Armenia in 1850s, we are coming from traditions where anarchist comrades gave the first liberation struggles in South America, in Indonesia, in Philippines... This is not for to create a third front against Nationalists and AKP. DAF does not consider itself in Turkish parliamentary political agenda. This is a new front that is against parliamentary solutions for social, economic and political problems.

E&A - For what you might observe in Rojava and accompanying with greater proximity, what would be the greatest virtues of the social system being developed in the region? And, in this same sense, what would be the biggest weaknesses in the sense of PYD-TEV DEM (Movement for a Democratic Society, in Kurdish: Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk) may be establishing a new State in the region? What are they reproducing that may end in another State?

DAF - Comrades, we have to strength the position of social revolution in Rojava in its all meaning. The people who are giving struggle there, giving struggle not for building for another oppressive state. This is a struggle for social revolution without a state, without capitalism, without patriarchy... We know the scenarios about being united with Barzani's Kurdistan or being a confederation in Esad's Syria. Our role must be to get participate and keep the social revolution away from these scenarios. If the solidarity of the revolutionary people is enough to create this stateless solution, it is useless to be afraid from these scenarios. This is not just our position in Rojava, this is also the position of Kurdish Liberation Movement.

E&A - We understand that the theme of the emancipation and empowerment of women is a huge amount, implicating in a single interview, but we can notice that this is an asset and an arrangement of the Kurdish-majority social process (and not sectarian, this is clear). In which aspects the presence of women combatants in YPJ is transforming social relations in Kurdistan as a whole? This has a direct relation with the PKK and organic thought of the women participation in the HPG?

DAF - There appeared Mala Jins (Women House) from the first day of revolution in

Rojava. Mala Jins, socialize awareness in the role of women in society, socialize struggle against the patriarchal culture, it socializes the importance of women in society. This effort is really important because ISIS and other radical Islamists try to shape whole region according to the values of their culture. Social revolution is not just a political change. We have to see the other changing like in women issue to understand the importance of Rojava Revolution.

E&A - To conclude, there is a great concern, because the facts are proving that Western societies (and their powers that be) observe the social process Rojava with sympathies and, in terms of behavior and rules of coexistence, the Kurdistan seems to be what the closest there is to a form of democratic, secular and liberal society. In the DAF's vision is there a real risk of the Kurdish left end by approaching to the West in a hopeless way (depending on Western support) that it may end as a secular and proto-State with gender equality (which is an achievement for the region) rather than a social revolution with real chances to build another society?

DAF - As we have written "We are not fortunetellers, we can't possibly know what will happen in Rojava a month or a year from now. We can't know that this social transformation which not only gives us hope as revolutionaries that struggle in a geographically close region, but also feeds our struggle in the regions that we struggle in, would move towards a positive or negative future. But we are revolutionary anarchists. We can't just sit aside, watch what's happening and comment; we take part in social struggles and take action for an anarchist revolution."

Long live the Rojava Revolution! Long live the Kobanê Resistance! Long live the Revolutionary Anarchism!

Bruno Lima Rocha has a PhD in Political Science and is a Professor of International Studies and Geopolitics teaching at three regional colleges and university in the South of Brazil.

Building autonomy in Turkey and Kurdistan: an interview with Revolutionary Anarchist Action

September 01, 2015

In May this year, Corporate Watch researchers travelled to Turkey and Kurdistan to investigate the companies supplying military equipment to the Turkish police and army. We talked to a range of groups from a variety of different movements and campaigns. Below is the transcript of our interview with three members of the anarchist group Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet (DAF, or Revolutionary Anarchist Action) in Istanbul during May 2015. DAF are involved in solidarity with the Kurdish struggle, the Rojava revolution and against ISIS' attack on Kobane, and have taken action against Turkish state repression and corporate abuse. They are attempting to establish alternatives to the current system through self-organisation, mutual aid and co-operatives.

The interview was carried out in the run-up to the Turkish elections, and touches on the election campaign by the HDP, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party. Soon after the interview took place, the HDP passed the threshold of 10% of the total vote needed to enter the Turkish parliament. The DAF members – who all preferred to remain anonymous – began the interview by talking about the history of anarchism in the region.

DAF: We want to underline the relationship between the freedom struggle at the end of Ottoman times and the freedom struggles of Kurdistan. In Ottoman times anarchists organised workers' struggle in the main cities: Saloniki, Izmir, Istanbul and Cairo. For example [the Italian anarchist, Errico] Malatesta was involved in organizing industrial workers in Cairo. The freedom struggles of Armenia, Bulgaria and Greece had connections with anarchist groups. Alexander Atabekian, an important person in the Armenian freedom struggle, was an anarchist, translating leaflets into Armenian and distributing them. He was a friend of [the Russian anarchist, Peter] Kropotkin and distributed Kropotkin's anarchist leaflets. We are talking about this as we want to underline the importance of freedom struggles and to compare this to the importance of support for the Kurdish struggle.

Corporate Watch: What happened to anarchists after the Ottoman period?

DAF: Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, at the end of the 19th century, Sultan Abdul Hamid II repressed the actions of anarchists in Turkey. He knew what anarchists were and took a special interest in them. He killed or deported anarchists and set up a special intelligence agency for this purpose. Anarchists responded by carrying out attacks on the Yildiz Sarayi palace and with explosions at the Ottoman bank in Saloniki. The government of the Ottoman Empire didn't end at the Turkish republic. The fez has gone since but the system is still the same. At the beginning of the [Kemalist] Turkish state [in 1923] many anarchists and other radicals were forced to emigrate or were killed. The CHP, Mustafa Kemal's party, didn't allow any opposition and there were massacres of Kurds. From 1923 to 1980 there was not a big anarchist movement in Turkey due to

the popularity of the socialist movements and the repression of the state. The wave of revolutions from the 1960s to the '80s affected these lands too. These were the active years of the social movements. During this period, there were revolutionary anti-imperialist movements caused by the Vietnam war, youth organizations, occupations of universities and increasing struggle of workers. These movements were Marxist-Leninist or Maoist, there were no anarchist movements. In 1970 there was a long workers' struggle. Millions of workers walked over a hundred kilometres from Kocaeli to Istanbul. Factories were closed and all the workers were on the streets.

CW: Was there any awareness of anarchism in Turkey at all at this time?

DAF: During these years many books were translated into Turkish from European radicalism but only five books about anarchism were translated, three of which were talking about anarchism in order to criticize it. But in Ottoman times there had been many articles on anarchism in the newspapers. For example, one of the three editors of the *İştirak* newspaper was an anarchist. The paper published [Russian anarchist, Mikhail] Bakunin's essays as well as articles on anarcho-syndicalism. The first anarchist magazine was published in 1989. After this many magazines were published focusing on anarchism from different perspectives; for example, post structuralism, ecology, etc. The common theme was that they were written for a small intellectual audience. The language of these magazines was too far away from the people. Most of those involved were connected with the universities or academia. Or they were ex-socialists affected by the fall of the Soviet Union, which was a big disappointment for many socialists. That's why they began to call themselves anarchists, but we don't think that this is a good way to approach anarchism, as a critique of socialism. Between 2000 to 2005 people came together to talk about anarchism in Istanbul and began to ask: "how can we fight?". At this time we guess that there were 50-100 anarchists living in Turkey and outside.

CW: Can you explain how DAF organises now?

DAF: Now we get 500 anarchists turning up for Mayday in Istanbul. We are in touch with anarchists in Antalya, Eskişehir, Amed, Ankara and İzmir. *Meydan* [DAF's newspaper] goes to between 15 and 20 cities. We have a newspaper bureau in Amed, distributing newspapers all over Kurdistan. Until now, it is in Turkish but maybe one day, if we can afford it, we will publish it in Kurdish. We send *Meydan* to prisons too. We have a comrade in İzmir in prison and we send copies to over 15 prisoners. A few months ago there was a ban on radical publications in prisons. We participated in demos outside prisons and we managed to make pressure about this and now newspapers are allowed to go into prisons again.

The main issue for DAF is to organise anarchism within society. We try to socialize anarchism with struggle on the streets. This is what we give importance to. For nearly nine years we have been doing this. On an ideological level we have a holistic perspective. We don't have a hierarchical perspective on struggles. We think workers' struggle is important but not more important than the Kurdish struggle or women's struggles or ecological struggles. Capitalism tries to divide these struggles. If the enemy

is attacking us in a holistic way we have to approach it in a holistic way. Anarchy has a bad meaning for most people in society. It has a link with terrorism and bombs. We want to legitimize anarchism by linking it to making arguments for struggles against companies and for ecology. Sometimes we try to focus on the links between the state, companies and ecological damages, like the thing that Corporate Watch does. We like to present anarchy as an organised struggle. We have shown people on the streets the organised approach to anarchism. From 1989 to 2000 anarchism was about image. About wearing black, piercings and Mohicans. This is what people saw. After 2000, people started to see anarchists who were part of women's struggles and workers' struggles. We are not taking anarchism from Europe as an imitation. Other anarchists have approached anarchism as an imitation of US or European anarchism or as an underground culture. If we want to make anarchist a social movement, it must change.

DAF's collectives are Anarchist Youth, Anarchist Women, 26A cafe, Patika ecological collective and high school anarchist action (LAF). These self-organisations work together but have their own decision-making processes.

Anarchist Youth makes connections between young workers and university students and their struggles. Anarchist Women focuses on patriarchy and violence to women. For example, a woman was murdered by a man and set on fire last February. On 25 November there were big protests against violence against women.

LAF criticises education and schooling in itself and tries to socialize this way of thinking in high schools. LAF also looks at ecological and feminist issues, including when young women are murdered by their husbands.

PATIKA ecological collective protests against hydro electric dams in the Black Sea region or Hasankey [where the Ilisu dam is being built]. Sometimes there is fighting to prevent these plants from being built.

26A Café is a self organization focusing on anti-capitalist economy. Cafes were opened in 2009 in Taksim and 2011 in Kadıköy [both in Istanbul]. The cafes are run by volunteers. They are aimed at creating an economic model in the place where oppressed people are living. It's important to show people concrete examples of an anarchist economy, without bosses or capitalist aims. We talk to people about why we don't sell the big capitalist brands like Coca Cola. Of course the products we sell have a relation to capitalism but things like Coke are symbols of capitalism. We want to progress away from not-consuming and move towards alternative economies and ways of producing.

Another self organisation, PAY-DA - 'Sharing and solidarity' - has a building in Kadıköy, which is used for meetings and producing the Meydan newspaper. PAY-DA gives meals to people three times a day. It's open to anarchists and comrades. The aim of PAY-DA is to become a cooperative, open to everybody. We try to create a bond which also involves the producers in the villages. We aim to have links with these producers and show them another economic model. We try to evolve these economic relations away from money relations. The producers are suffering from the capitalist economy. We are in the first

steps of this cooperative and we are looking for producers to work with.

All of these projects are related to DAF's ideology. This model has a connection with Malatesta's binary model of organization. These are anarchist organizations but sometimes people who aren't anarchists join these struggles because they know ecological or women's struggles, and then at the end they will learn about anarchism. It's an evolving process. As DAF we are trying to organise our lives. This is the only way that we can touch the people who are oppressed by capitalism.

There is also the Conscientious Objectors' Association, which is organised with other groups, not just anarchists. Our involvement in this has a relation with our perspective on Kurdistan. We organize anti-militarist action in Turkey outside of military bases on 15 May, conscientious objector's day. In Turkey the military is related to state culture. If you don't do your military duty, you won't find a job and it's difficult to find someone to marry because they ask if you've been to the army. If you have been to the army, you're a 'man'. People see the state as the 'Fatherland'. On your CV they ask whether you did military service. 'Every Turk is born a soldier' is a popular slogan in Turkey.

CW: Is Kemalism [the ideology associated with Mustafa Kemal] as strong a force as it used to be?

DAF: Kemalism is still a force in schools but the AKP has changed this somewhat. The AKP has a new approach to nationalism focused on the Ottoman Empire. It emphasises Turkey's 'Ottoman roots'. But Erdoğan still says that we are 'one nation, one state, one flag and one religion.'. There is still talk about Mustafa Kemal but not as much as before. Now you cannot criticize Erdoğan or Atatürk [the name used for Kemal by Turkish nationalists]. It's the law not to criticize Atatürk and the unwritten rule not to criticize Erdoğan. The media follows these rules.

CW: Can you talk about your perspective on the Kurdish freedom struggle?

DAF: Kurdish freedom struggles didn't start with Rojava. Kurdish people have had struggles for hundreds of years against the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish state. Since the start of DAF we have seen Kurdistan as important for propaganda and education. Our perspective relates to people's freedom struggles. The idea that people can create federations without nations, states and empires. The Turkish state says the issue is a Kurdish problem, but for us it is not a Kurdish problem, it's an issue of Turkish policies of assimilation. It's obvious that since the first years of the Turkish republic the assimilation of Kurdish people has not stopped. We can see this from the last Roboski massacre [of 34 Kurdish cross-border traders by Turkish F16s on 28 December 2011] by the state during the 'peace process'. We can see this in the denial of Kurdish identity or the repeated massacres. Making people assimilate to be a Turk and making the propaganda of nationalism.

The AKP [the ruling Justice and Development Party] say they have opened Kurdish TV channels, allowed Kurdish language and that we are all brothers and sisters, but on the other hand we had the Roboski massacre which occurred during their government. In 2006 there was government pressure on Erdoğan at a high level. Erdoğan said that women and children would be punished who go against Turkish policies. Over 30 children were murdered by police and army. The words change but the political agenda continues, just under a new government. We do not call ourselves Turkish. We come from many ethnic origins and Kurdish is one of them. Our involvement in conscientious objection is part of this perspective. We want to talk to people to prevent people from going to the army to kill their brothers and sisters. After the 2000s there has been an ideological change in the Kurdish freedom struggle. The Kurdish organizations no longer call themselves Marxist-Leninist and Öcalan has written a lot about democratic confederalism. This is important, but our relation to Kurdish people is on the streets.

CW: Can you talk about DAF's work in solidarity with people in Rojava?

DAF: In July 2012 at the start of the Rojava revolution, people began saying that it was a stateless movement. We have been in solidarity from the first day of the revolution. Three cantons have declared their revolution in a stateless way. We try to observe and get more information. This is not an anarchist revolution but it is a social revolution declared by the people themselves.

Rojava is a third front for Syria against Assad, ISIS and other Islamic groups. But these are not the only groups that the revolution is faced with. The Turkish republic is giving support for ISIS from its borders. The national intelligence agency of the Turkish republic appears to be giving weapons to ISIS and other Islamic groups. Kurdish people declared the revolution under these circumstances.

After the ISIS attack on Kobane began [in 2014] we went to Suruç. We waited at the border as Turkish forces were attacking people crossing. When people wanted to cross the border to or from Kobane they were shot. We stayed there to provide protection. In October, people gathered near Suruç, and broke through the border. Turkish tanks shot gas over the border at them. From 6 to 8 October there were Kobane solidarity demonstrations across Turkey. Kader Ortakya, a Turkish socialist supporter of Kobane, was shot dead trying to cross the border.

We helped people. Some people crossed the border from Kobane and had no shelter. We prepared tents, food and clothes for them. Sometimes soldiers came to the villages with tear gas and water cannons and we had to move. Some people came through the border searching for their families and we helped them. Other people came, wanting to cross the border and fight and we helped them. We wore clothing that said we were from DAF on it. The YPG and YPJ ['People's Protection Units' of Rojava, the YPJ is a women's militia] pushed ISIS back day by day. Miştenur hill was very important for Kobane. After the hill was taken by the YPG and YPJ some people wanted to return to Kobane. When they went back their houses had been destroyed by ISIS. Some houses were mined and some people have been killed by the mines. The mines need to be cleared, but by who and how? People need new houses and help. We have had conferences and talked

about how to help Kobane. There was a conference two weeks ago in Amed.

CW: What is your position on the elections?

DAF: We do not believe in parliamentary democracy. We believe in direct democracy. We do not support the HDP in the election, but we have links in solidarity with them on the streets. Emma Goldman said that if elections changed anything they would be illegal. There are good people in the HDP who say good things, but we think that the government can't be good because the election system isn't equal. In Rojava they do not call it an anarchist revolution, but there's no government, no state and no hierarchy, so we believe in it and have solidarity with it.

CW: Can you tell us about the bombing in Suruç [we asked this final question by email weeks after the original interview

DAF: Over 30 young people who wanted to take part in reconstruction of Kobane were killed by an ISIS attack. This attack was clearly organised by the Turkish State. They did not even do anything to stop it although they got the information of the attack one month before. Moreover, after the explosion the Turkish State has attacked Rojava and made operations against political organisations in Turkey. Now there are many operations and political pressures on anarchists and socialists and Kurdish organisations. They are using the explosion as a reason to make this political repression on both the domestic and international levels.

We have lost our 33 comrades, friends who struggled for the Rojava Revolution against the state's repression, denial and politics of massacre. There are people who are killed by state, ISIS and other powers. But our resistance won't stop, our struggle will continue, as always in history.

The DAF (*Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet – Revolutionary Anarchist Action*) are an anarchist group located in Turkey, based in Istanbul. For close to a decade they have been working in labour issues, women's struggles, economic theory and radical schooling. They publish a newspaper, *Meydan*, that is distributed in over twenty cities in Turkey and Kurdistan, and run several urban anarchist communes in Istanbul.

The DAF have been in solidarity in the Kurdish revolution since its inception and several members participated in the military defence of Kobane, and the rebuilding and social and economic work afterward.

This pamphlet collects two interviews with the DAF on the issue of Rojava and Kurdish liberation, on anarchism today in Turkey, and an article by DAF member Huseyin Civan.

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