The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC). We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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To hear our past shows for free, visit:
https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org

Anarchists In Conflict

February 24, 2019

This zine features the transcription of interviews anarchist comrades did concerning Rojava and the Yellow Vest Movement (Gilets Jaunes) in France. The latter was a conversation with an anarchist in Paris on the movement. Ala Rojava: a chat about solidarity in the EU with Abdullah Öcalan by Dissident Island; Črna Luknja with a member of Tekošina Anarşist and a conversation with Zahir Bahir of the Kurdistan Anarchist Forum in London, UK. All audios came from the 5th Annual A-Radio Network gathering in Zurich, Switzerland.
This week on the final straw radio, this episode’s theme is anarchist interventions in struggles around the world. We’ll be sharing content from the A-Radio network, which just had its fifth annual gathering in Zurich, Switzerland. The A-Radio network is made up of stations and podcasts from around Europe, plus a smattering in South and North America. We’ve been a member of the A Radio network for four years now, which over the last year and a half produces the monthly ‘Bad News: Angry Voices From Around the World’ news podcast in english, made up of contributions from A-Radio member projects. You can find past episodes at https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org searching for the term A-Radio Network.

In lieu of this months Bad News, the gathering produced an eight hour radio show last week and elements end up in this broadcast. We’ll be presenting here two episodes from that broadcast, concerning the struggle for autonomy in the social revolutionary region of Rojava in northern Syria, as well as an interview conducted two weeks ago with an anarchist in Paris, France involved in the Yellow Vest social movement, for some updates and perspectives on that.

But first, we’ll be airing audio from another member of the A-Radio as well as Channel Zero Network projects, Dissident Island from London and the UK, with a review about the geopolitics of Rojava and leadership with the Kurdish struggle with a comrades participating in the annual ‘Long March’ in solidarity with Abdullah Öcalan. We apologize for the audio quality, and we invite you to notice the differences in opinion between the anarchists who have witnessed, lived or fought for the Rojava Revolution, as somewhere within and between their perspectives, I believe, lies some of the truth of this complex situation there. More by Dissident Island Radio at http://dissidentisland.org

**Dissident Island Radio with Kawa on ‘Long March’ in solidarity with Abdullah Öcalan, Rojava Geopolitics & Leadership**

**Dissident Island Radio:** Now in our final piece tonight we discuss the ongoing Kurdish struggle and the campaign to free Abdullah Öcalan.

Hi Kawa, thanks for joining us here on the show tonight, do you want to introduce yourself a bit?

**Kawa:** Yes well I can say that I’m now in a bus in the direction to Strassbourg for the demonstration that will happen tomorrow in solidarity with the Kurdish movement and that I’m taking part of the international Long March and that several people from more than ten countries from different places around Europe are with me right now in this bus going to, uh, Strassbourg.

**D*I:** Cool and the march stated in Luxembourg, there was a kickoff event in Luxembourg last Sunday?

**Kawa:** Right, exactly. We start in Luxembourg and have been walking since there. And we have been crossing different villages and places around france and meeting the different Kurdish community and different political groups in different places we go.

**D*I:** How many people on the march, how many people doing the full kind of distance?

**Kawa:** Well, Thanks so much for speaking with us and good luck out there today.

**AIP:** Oh, thanks a lot.
political framework in the sense that usually France, when there is like a social movement, there is always like a call made by trade unions or traditional leftist parties to start a social movement or a demonstration, and for the first time it’s just like people in the streets that gathered and were brought together because of shared frustrations and that refuse any form of like political parties or political trade unions became part of it. So they really started from just common people deciding to gather by their own means and organize by their own means, so there’s like a really interesting aspect in this.

Because we can clearly see some links between our ways of organizing as anarchists and the way the movement started in a sense, with the ideas of being leaderless, decentralized and a horizontal platform. So that’s the things that are inspiring but there’s also a lot of problems within the movement. First, of course, it’s the apolitical stance that the movement decided to embrace from the beginning. And this apolitical stance allowed a lot of like, reactionary tendencies to use the movement as a platform for their own ideas and actions. Since the beginning of the movement there have been a lot of issues with fascist groups taking part in the movement and fighting alongside anarchists and other demonstrators. There have been a lot of problem with conspiracy like discourse, misogynist discourse, racist discourse, anti-Semitic discourse, nationalist discourse too. So that’s a major problem and it still remain a problem nowadays. That is to say just yesterday in the Parisian demonstration fascists were there too, but luckily, which is inspiring the group of 20 fascists or so got kicked out by yellow vesters and radials. So even if they are still taking part in demonstration there is at least an answer from part of the demonstration to clearly chase them out of the actions. So that’s also something that we need to keep working on, to continue making the movement somehow welcoming for those groups of individuals which is extremely difficult.

Because only three weeks ago fascists were super organized in Paris and attacked two weeks in a row an anti-racist block that was within the Yellow Vest movement. So right now we have a second front within the movement that leads to a lot of street flights between anti-racists and fascists. So that’s still problematic.

Something that is also really problematic among the movement is that because the movement is really unpredictable, the Yellow Vests are still trying to find a way to increase their structure and to get more efficient. So in January, for example, for the first time since the beginning of the yellow vest movement the so-called leaders of the movement in Paris decided to make a legal demonstration instead of the wildcat demos that they used to do before. Let me explain: when I said a legal demonstration, they decided to discuss with authorities so the authorities will allow a specific march with the people organizing the demonstration. So for the first time they agreed with the authorities to work hand-in-hand on organizing the demonstration with clearly was a big step back in the process of trying to be some kind of grassroots power against authorities and the government. While doing this, the Yellow Vest movement also decided to create their own security group to protect the Yellow Vest participants, and from this specific security groups they hired a lot of ex-paramilitary that are well known far right figures, and for example some of these ex-paramilitary fought in the Donbass during the Ukrainian uprising along side pro-Russians. It’s really problematic to see that for their own security the Yellow Vest movement decide to hire well known fascists and ex-paramilitary to do the job. That’s a major issue also that we’ve been facing. So far we don’t know if this will keep happening or not so that’s clearly something we need to try to fight against and making this ex-paramilitary also unwelcome.
of Euros and the material of supporting refugees but at the end there is no keeping track of this money and we can see how this money it’s ending in building military bases or like the wall that Turkey built in 2016, a wall that it’s more than 600 km between the border of Turkey and Syria for control the Kurdish people to not cross from Turkey to Syria. And we can see how in Europe the ban on PKK it’s only forcing Kurdish people to have more difficulties to work in solidarity since we can see how Abdullah Ocalan has been the president of the PKK, the Kurdish Workers Party, and this ban accusing the PKK of terrorist organization making is things much more difficult. But at the same time, in fact a few months ago there was an initiative in the European Parliament to remove the ban on PKK and at the end at the last sentence on the European Parliament that yes, it’s true, that PKK is never making any kind of terrorist attack or any kind of terrorist actually in Europe. So it’s right that actually we have no reasons for keep them on the terrorist list. But anyway, even saying that, the PKK is still on the terrorist list of the European Union.

D*F: And the whole situation is very confusing for someone on the outside to fully understand because the PKK is not actually in Syria or in Turkey but Ocalan is arrested in Turkey and the US were supporting the YPG/YPJ, the Syrian defense forces, to defeat ISIL in Syria. And they recently announced less than two months ago that they were eventually going to remove their backing and withdraw from Syria and this had caused quite a lot of concern about Turkey is going to do in that northwestern region of Rojava, so do you want to say a bit about what people’s response there has been?

Kawa: Yeah, it’s true there can be a bit complicated because we have a lot of different actors in the same conflict. First for clarify the situation it’s important to understand that when we talk that when we talk about Kurdistan and the Kurdish people, we are talking about, uh, at one time about Turkey but at the same time about Syria, about Iran, about Iraq, and of course over one million of Kurdish people that are in Germany and in other countries all around the world. It’s a lot of actors at the same time, so when we see the situation in Rojava right now we can see that since 2012 there is this social revolution that is happened there where there Kurdish people in the north of Syria start to manage society outside the frame of nation-state.

So it’s interesting to see how the Kurdish liberation movement was born with a frame of national liberation movement in the frame of building a Kurdish state but the beginning of the 2000s they reformulate the political project and they make this step, uh, this step that they call Democratic Confederalist pushing for a society that is based on values of the women’s liberation, ecology, and direct democracy without a state. So we can see how since the autonomy of Rojava in 2012 they are building this society based on these ideas, we can see how in Turkey the Kurdish people in the southeast of Turkey they were also building this autonomy, a system based on Democratic Confederalist, but the Turkish state completely attacked them and in 2015 they start a lot of military operations destroying a lot of cities. Cities like Nusaybin were completely destroyed by the Turkish army. It’s important to see that now the army wants to enter the north of Syria but it’s not something new, like the war from the Turkish state against the Kurdish people have been for a lot of years. In the 90’s there was a huge war.

Now Turkey wants to attack the Kurds in Syria but of course Syria means to cross a border so it means that still Turkey is a county that’s part of NATO. And of course like Russia that’s a country that has been supporting more the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and can put objections if government’s proposal of increasing taxes on fuels for supposedly ecological purposes. Um, then, people realized that this increase of taxes will worsen their living situation. Therefor they decided to oppose the government’s decision. It is important to remember that the same government before wanted to increase taxes on fuels, this idea at the beginning of 2016 to clearly stop taxing the ultra rich. And so by these two kind of decisions, one of like reducing taxes for the ultra rich and increasing taxes on fuels for people who are constantly dependent on their cars, this created the spark that put people out in the streets. And so since November 17th every single week people decided to get organized wherever they were living, that is to say some people decided to gather during major demonstration in major cities in France. Or simply blocking traffic circles. The Yellow Vest movement was supposedly apolitical, leaderless and decentralized at first. And I think that it’s important to notice that instead of talking about the Yellow Vest movement as whole unit, it’s important to approach it as several movements with their own characteristic strategies and specificities depending on the geographical area we are studying. So yeah, for like the little background of the Yellow Vest movement that’s what I have right now. Of course, the movement had like different stages. For example the beginning of it led to a major riot, like in Paris at the Champs-Elyséeses there have been like huge riots in the three first weeks of the movement. Then by mid-December it seems like the movement was reaching some kind of plateau with the Christmas holidays approaching, but a lot of us were afraid that it would end up dying after the Christmas holidays. But surprisingly in 2019 it started all over again and until today there are still people in the streets.

RG: Yeah, so I didn’t know if you would want to to talk a little more about what’s going on now and how it has changed or where you think it’s going to go.

AIP: Okay, so like about what is going on now, um, it’s a bit difficult to know. Yesterday there were major national day of action and in Paris there have been some clashed with police forces as usual and about 5,000 people took the streets, which is kind of like massive compared to the previous week. So clearly there are still people willing to be in the streets fighting for their living situations against the government. And this didn’t also just happen in Paris but there was also demonstration in Rouen, Toulouse, Leon, so it was really like a national call again. But what is going on now, it’s difficult. In the sense that people are still gathering in the streets, people are still upset but there’s feeling we are clearly reaching another kind of plateau, according to me.

RG: Yeah, if you want to talk about maybe a little bit all the different forces that have been at play, what’s been inspiring or problematic.

AIP: Uh, so, I think what is important to remember what is inspiring first to the movement is that it’s been lasting for three months and this is something that is quite rare and we should acknowledge it because the government tried on several occasions to pacify the situations by making concessions, by trying open dialogue with some forces among the movement. But besides all the attempts of pacifying the situation and turning the pages of the Yellow Vest movement, the movement is still in the streets, people are still angry, upset, and part of the die-hard participants refuse complete dialogue with the government and have lost all trust in politicians and the system itself. So I think that’s something first really inspiring because it’s quite rare that among our circles or even among social movements there is like, this capacity of lasting so long and refusing any form of dialogue. Another inspiring fact is that the movement started as a grassroots response without any traditional
Start your support for Rojava. Support them critically. If you support it, you can see what’s going on and wrong with the movement and how we can or want to tackle the problem. It cannot be good to only criticize Rojava. I believe that every movement has good and bad things. We need to promote the good and reject the bad. Referring to the positive points I mentioned, we need to promote these points. At the same time there are negative points that we should not support. What’s important for anarchist comrades is to support the movement, but also to criticize it on the basis of our ideas. It is not right to align with the US or the UK, it’s wrong to line up with them, it’s wrong how the town meetings are shaped and how influential cadres are. This is why we need to offer both criticism and solidarity.

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Turkey wants to enter Syria, so that’s why there have been so many objections and diplomatic interactions with so many different actors and Turkey’s getting closer and closer to Russia in order to have green light from Russia in order to allow them to attack the Kurds in northern Syria and Rojava. So we can see since the announcement of Donald Trump in December 15th that they withdraw from Syria they start to withdraw the diplomatic body of US in Syria, some soldiers are still remainin there. And these has been presented for Erdogan as an example of how Donald Trump is ready to withdraw from Syria for allowing Turkey to enter there. After that there was some contradiction messages, it’s not clear, if the US will allow Turkey to fully enter the north of Syria with bombs and airplanes and drones like they did in Afrin one year ago. Or if they will stop Turkey to use planes, though it’s a discussion ongoing you can see how Turkey is now also talking with Iran, Russia in these international meetings that they are having after the process of Astana. And it’s a really complicated situation with a lot of different actors that it’s sometimes different to follow maybe.

D*! And how does it feel to be a part of that actually? Because it’s one thing to attempt to build an alternative community structure that’s really quite large - the region that it’s covering is not insignificant, there’s many many small communes that make up this region of north Syria - so how does it feel to be a part of that, to try and build that, and at the same time be so incredibly vulnerable to all of these international geopolitical movements over which you have absolutely no influence, no control, no ability, you’re just completely vulnerable in that situation?

Kawa: Yeah, and this vulnerability, it’s really interesting point though because we can see the hegemony of the model of the nation-state succeed in taking over the world. And since the Kurdish movement is northeast Syria they are developing a society outside the frame of nation-states, the threat of nation-states is always there. And we can especially how Daesh, the ISIS, the Islamic State start try to create their own system also outside the frame and in opposition to that, and of course the Kurdish people were in the need to defend themselves. And that’s what allow them to also allow them to take so much territory because the threat of the Islamic State and the terror society that they were implementing on all the people were a direct war and somehow the Kurds were saying “We’re defending ourselves and we are fighting also, not fighting Daesh because we want to fight them. It’s just because this is a threat for humanity, this is a pure fascist system. So it’s an antifascist struggle and we need to defeat them.”

And since all this war against the islamic state, a lot of different territories that have been liberated from the caliphate have been joining to the Autonomous Administration that the Kurds started in the north. When I went to Rojava and I had the opportunity to view for one year how this society’s working for one year interesting to see how they are succeeding in developing a system outside the frame of the nation-state with the women’s liberation as a main point of this social transformation but, of course, all the states that are surrounding this territory don’t recognize Rojava as something that they can fear. There is a problem that when the situation of war came, it’s really difficult to defend yourself from an army like Turkey, that it’s a member of NATO with warplanes, drones, like full technology of NATO. And of course, no one will ever sell of give anti-aircraft weapons to Rojava because they are not an actor that can be recognized as a state and they don’t want to be so, uh, somehow it’s a really complicated situation and we can see how all these structure of capitalism and the connection of capitalism with, uh, the weapon industry it’s creating a system which is not allowing other projects outside the frame of nation-state to exist because there
is this military frontier that you can’t go and we saw it in Afrin one year ago when was the division of Afrin and it was really clear that the military technology was creating a border that you can’t overcome.

**D*I:** I think that something that Rojava has shown us over the past year is just how difficult the creation of an alternative way of structuring society really is. I mean we had some of this experience seeing what was going on in Latin America some years ago but I guess Rojava is the most recent example of this, and it’s been really impressive to see people actually putting their own lives on the line and going out and fighting the powers that are trying to stop them from existing. Has that the willingness to fight and the demands that fighting has made on that society, like has it had an impact on the communes and the way that they’re organized or has it has any effect in that way?

**Kawa:** Of course it have effect but I think it’s important to understand the Kurdish people they are used to live outside the frame of nation-state. We can see how in a lot of the structures in the system of communes that they are developing, it may sound like something new for us but for them it’s nothing that it’s completely new. They have been living in this system from, like, forever. So it’s important to see that this process that they are doing it’s without states because they have the knowledge of how the state and it’s important to see how at some point the communes are able to exist now because Daesh has been defeated so a lot of places before the communes was the war. And the war was the thing that was more necessary, so we can see how not only the Kurdish people from Rojava but the Kurdish people from all around Kurdistan came to the northern Syria to fight against the Islamic state because they know that the Kurds are their brothers and their sisters and every step and every city that was liberated, the Kurdish people was able to go back to their cities and then they realized that they were able to win the war so they were able to bring this system of Democratic Confederalist to the maximum example. So before they were already somehow living in a communal way, building up communes, but the point is that now the Syrian state left because they were not able to fight the Islamic State and now they are self-managing all the parts of society. They succeed in creating a self-managed system of justice, a self-managed system of economy based on cooperatives. So they are in a full way of managing all the aspects of life, all the aspects of society outside the frame of nation-state. And of course for the communes it has a huge impact, this war, as they know they can exist and they have the life that they have today because the war that they did and they always remember all the people that has been fighting and all the people that has died.

**D*I:** And what was it like to be an international there, what does it feel like to go there as an international person?

**Kawa:** Well, it’s a really interesting experience. We can see how a lot of people already went there as internationalists, especially since 2014-15 a lot of people started to join more in the military side, in the fight against the Islamic State. But since the war against Islamic State was able to take more land and to liberate more territories this society system that they are building is attracting more and more the attention of internationals. So I was one of these internationals that went there in the civilian side, I was traveling there for see the society, for see what means to build the revolution, what means to build a society without a state, what means to build this system of Democratic Confederalism that they are building. And for me I can say that I was really impressed for see a lot of things that seems impossible to be, but at the same time it’s a really hard situation so we’re just fighting a war that means a lot of people and a lot of resources needs to focus on this war and it’s

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**ARN:** Nonetheless, there is some sort of emancipation happening. Where do you see the most emancipatory elements within the current development?

**ZB:** Before I come to the positive point, I’d to point out that if they get defeated it will take a long time to emerge again. In my opinion, this will leave a very bad picture for the people. In the end this will cause a lot of problems and the idea of Democratic Confederalism and the movement as such will be damaged. Regardless of what happened, the movement in general is good. They are supporting the building and emergence of local groups. This is what we are trying to do in Başur, and what is at the core of anarchist ideas. That is one thing. Another thing is the empowerment of individuals. The third thing is the emergence of the women’s movement. The women’s issues were, and are promoted. It took quite a lot in order to develop and support the women’s role. If you are comparing KRG and Rojava, in the KRG women’s issues have women in the past 27 years rather than decreased. Men are in power. When it comes to Rojava, there is a fourth positive point: the ecological issue. It’s important and a direct reference to Öcalan. They have done very little work to ecology, but in fact even if there is only information spread, it’s important. We cannot work towards an ecological society if we are in war. But they still did it and that’s impressive. The fifth positive point is that they make the people live together. Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, etc. That was a big step because still many people at many places are fighting each other based on ethnics, religion and other identitarian reasons. In Rojava, they separated religion from the power. They made religion a religion’s personal issue, and separated from the political area. They don’t force people not to have a religion, but created another way of decision making in this regard.

**ARN:** What’s your point of view about Democratic Confederalism from an anarchist perspective?

**ZB:** It’s a big issue, basically. I don’t think that anybody’s definition’s as good as Bookchin’s. I completely agree with Bookchin. I think there are many important things within his concept. One of them is the argument against the nation-state. It’s not only for the working class, but it’s for all the people. Everyone is building up the confederal society. In Bookchin’s eyes, we have to democratize the municipalities and regard the municipality as the alternative to the nation-state. He calls this alternative ‘libertarian municipalism’ and regards it as the possibility to achieve a socialist society. In this regard, Öcalan and Bookchin agree with one difference. Bookchin called it ‘libertarian municipalities’ and Ocalan called the units ‘people’s houses’. People’s houses are an assembly of the people, these assemblies contain representatives of the groups. In practice, people’s houses are representing local groups. But in the case of Rojava, it seems that people that are on top of the People’s Houses are always the same ones. Bookchin wants everyone to get involved, and everyone to be entitled to get involved, even though he did not believe in consensus within big groups. But he never believed in a leader. He constructed a concept where people can be replaced at any time. For Bookchin, everything has to rotate and people have to change in order to prevent hierarchy and power structures. And I just want to add something, I think that in Rojava it seems to me now that putting decisions into practice is made by the same body that is taken the decision. But it should never be one body, the decision maker and the decision implementor. A decision should always be made by the vast majority of people. In this regard, Bookchin was very clear about Confederalism. What he said was that Confederalism was only administrative. The members of assemblies need to be empowered to participate in direct action and direct democracy. Members of higher bodies should be strictly mandated to be in an assembly or in a group, they should only be chosen to administrate and coordinate the politics that have been shaped by the assembly itself. It’s never ever
ARN: You have published many articles about the developments in Rojava. What are your most important points about the situation on the ground?

ZB: The situation is continuously changing. What I thought last year was that there was time to resolve the Kurdish issue in the region. There was no guarantee if Assad is winning the battle and if he’ll negotiate or if he’ll attack. I said if Assad is defeated in Idlib, then the Turkish state will overrun the Kurdish people. However, US and Trump don’t want their power and forces staying there and of course it is important to talk about the interests of the Turkish state and Erdogan. There is no way for any state to support the Kurdish people in expense of their relationship to Turkey. This is one thing. The second thing is one with which a vast majority of Kurdish intellectuals disagree with me, but I can always say that Erdogan is a very clever political that knows how to play. He plays with Russia, with ISIS and with the KRG. He even managed to involve the PKK in a peace process, but now the situation in Rojava and Bakur is getting worse. At the moment there is heavy fighting between the last ISIS groups and the Syrian Democratic forces in Dier ez-Zor. For me it was important that PYD would not get involved so much in the fight against ISIS. This wasn’t a Kurdish war due to many reasons. One of them is that Turkey was exporting his own interior crisis into Northern Syria. This was one reason. Another important thing to talk about is the embargo. Democratic Confederalism is a big task for many, many people. Not only for cadre or PYD or a small minority. In order to achieve that we need an enormous revolution, in education, economic, ecological and other spheres. So ignoring the cultural and political revolution was and is a threat to successful societal change. This is also connected with the embargo. As soon as the money starts to flow and if the sanctions were lifted, this will influence the situation and is a threat to solidarity. If there wouldn’t have been sanctions, Rojava could have been defeated a long time ago.

ARN: One of your main arguments is the gap between the theory of Democratic Confederalism and it’s practical outcome in Northern Syria. Could you say a few words about that?

ZB: In my article ‘Confederalism,’ I argue that Bookchin and Ocalan don’t have many differences in their definition of Confederalism. They’re only minor differences. Basically, Bookchin extends his idea to feminism, but Ocalan goes beyond that and extends it to a feminist movement. In addition, Bookchin never believed that a political party can achieve Democratic Confederalism by itself, but in Rojava at the moment it is mainly the PYD that is trying to install and achieve Democratic Confederalism. Bookchin believed in decentralization, and according to what I know, and according to people who went to Rojava it is not exactly Democratic Confederalism that is happening there, as it is mainly executed and organized by political parties. If you give power to political parties to the PYD, you give it to an organization with hierarchy. None of their decisions like cooperating with the US or negotiations with the Kurdish opposition were based on debate with people, but based on decisions made by a tiny minority within the PYD and probably in accordance with PKK cadres. This kind of things, if you look at the connection to the US and the hierarchical organization and the focus on fighting, this is done on the expenses of the commune and the communal organization. This is the opposite direction of Democratic Confederalism. I think PYD and PKK, both of them are somehow counteracting Ocalan’s ideas. His ideas are very clear when it comes to Democratic Confederalism. As many people attack us, we will defend ourselves but we will not attack.

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really important to see how this situation there it’s really hard. But what they are building it’s something that can bring a lot of inspiration in order to develop new ways of thinking and understanding the society that can allow the humanity to think beyond the nation-state, beyond capitalism, beyond patriarchy and try to bring new ideas and new hopes to the revolutionary movements all around the world. Like, we saw in the ’90s with the Zapatistas movement that was giving inspiration to a lot of movements, a lot of revolutionary organizations. We can see how this is happening in Rojava and to be able to be there and to see not only the nice parts and all the beautiful things that you can see but also the difficulties, the sacrifices, and all the problems that they are facing. It’s giving perspective for how we can also start to develop a revolutionary movements all around the world in our countries because somehow if we go there as internationalists it’s not just for going there to see the situation in Rojava, we are also going there for learn, for understand their movement, how they succeed on doing this revolution and then bringing these ideas back home and being able to develop an internationalist movement. We can develop a revolution all around the world.

For me also I’m from Catalonia, so the impact of the international brigades that came in Spain in 1936 at least more than 50,000 peoples from different countries fighting fascism together, um, it had a huge impact. So now we can see how fascism is affecting Rojava, is attacking the people in northern Syria. So it’s important also to have this in mind and to see that internationalist is not something that is in the books of history, it’s something that is it’s happening right now. So we can see internationalists from all around the world are going there to learn, to support and for fight to defend this revolution.

D*: You said that the march that you’re doing right now is calling for the EU to put pressure on Turkey to release Ocalan. So I have a slightly perhaps controversial question. How important is Ocalan to the movement, is it necessary that there is a leader in the movement or is it more of a kind of solidarity support for an arrested comrade? What’s the dynamic there?

Kawa: It’s a good question, and especially for anarchist people who have been interested in the stateless society that they are building it’s sometimes a bit contradictory, no? This focus on the leader. But it’s important to understand when Abdullah Ocalan started this movement he was always trying to give perspectives on developing revolutionary line in this movement and of course he has been respected for all the perspective and all the ideological background. He’s a person that was writing a lot of books and was giving a lot of political perspectives because he had been studying a lot of different revolutions, different movements. And the point is that he did not it alone, so he was always pushing for education, for studying, for learning together. So the threat of catching him and putting him in jail when Turkey was making the trial they condemn him to seven death penalties but somehow Europe and the western powers was putting pressure for make the Turkey cannot execute him and they have been keeping him in complete isolation in this jail so it’s important to see also how he’s in jail and he’s not able to push for the revolutionary struggle in a practical way, he has been using this time to read a lot and to develop this frame of Democratic Confederalism. So it’s important to see Ocalan not only as the political or military leader but also as one that brings the ideological perspectives, all the ideas of Democratic Confederalism that are summarized in this Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization that is this five books that he wrote from prison, are the books that are presenting this model of Democratic Confederalist that somehow we can see that is a
synthesis of all the things that he was reading and all the things also that he was experiencing when
he was in the guerrilla movement, in this revolutionary movements. So when read these ideas of
Democratic Confederalist we can see influence from all this Marxist background that this
movement have, but of course also we can see a lot of influences from different authors. He’s even
quoting Bakunin in some books, Sylvia Federici so a lot of different thinkers that are giving
perspectives so he’s the one who made the synthesis and for this the Kurdish people it’s really know
how he put a lot of effort on giving a perspective for a solution not only for Kurdistan but for
middle east and all the world, making this synthesis of other revolutionary movements.

And for this it’s also important to understand the reality in Middle East. Like, middle east has been
a place where the oppression and all the attacks of the colonialism has been really strong and we
can see how one hundred years ago after the first world war the western powers went there and
started to build the nation-states and the dynamics on middle east are not fitting with this system of
nation-state, and they are keeping with the system of tribes and different clans so for them this point
of the leadership is something that’s really rooted in the society. That of course, from a western
view can be difficult to understand and to give meaning. And I think that even for me, before to go
there, it was sometimes difficult to understand. But there you can see how this kind of leadership is
bringing unity in order to face the enemy so somehow also the point that he’s in isolation as a
political prisoner it’s also increasing the solidarity for all the people but it’s not only him, there are
thousands of Kurdish peoples in jails, especially in Turkey, that they are also developing a huge
movement of resistance in jails, an anti-jail movement. But of course he as the leader of these
revolutionary movement have a special importance for the Kurdish people.

D*1: So there was a very interesting and really quite brutal critique a few years ago released by the
anarchist federation, of Ocalan, comparing him to Gadafi and Gadafi’s pre-dictatorship politics,
and then what actually transpired. And I wondered if recognizing kind of the brutality of the
geopolitical dynamics that are going on with all of these nation-states fighting for different reasons
over this territory, and then also within the wider region of Kurdistan, how many different smaller
groups exist that are all toeing not exactly the same line, which is positive in some way and also the
ability of a leader to unite these people. Having been there, do you feel that there is structural
resilience within what you’ve seen, within the structure of the communes against a kind of re-hash
of a kind of Gadafi situation, of a leader coming in and then eventually capitulating under these
geopolitical dynamics and having to force a dictatorship through, like is there a resilience to that
happening.

Kawa: Yes, for sure, the implementation of Democratic Confederalism it’s really interesting to see
how they are pushing a lot for the development of the communes, how they are really creating
systems for avoid any kind of centralization of powers. For example they are building different
committees for take care of different things, and for example in Rojava there is one big city,
Qamişlo, somehow it’s the biggest city in Rojava and they are putting a lot of effort toward these
committees, like for culture or economy and to avoid to put the central place of these kind of
institutions in Qamişlo and to decentralize completely them. Somehow they have a huge analysis on
the society and the nation-state and what they are understanding is that nation-state it’s the main
power of centralization, of homogenization, of control. So in order to avoid a dictatorship, in order
to avoid a fascism to happen, the most important thing is to decentralize the power, to decentralize
the society for allow anyone to be autonomous and in the commune system it’s exactly this, they are

Anarchists In Conflict – February 24, 2019

Zahir Bahir: I am Zahir Bahir, originally from Iraq, I am part of Kurdistan Anarchist Forum and part
different anarchist groups in London, among others Rebel City. I am also engaged in writing and
translation, and as I am retired I am now a full-time activist.

ARN: Let us talk about Rojava. When have you last been there and what was your general
impression?

ZB: Well, in respect to Rojava, basically I am part of the Kurdistan Anarchist Forum. We believe in
building local groups and changing the society from the bottom and not from the top. At the time I
was really excited, I had a close friend who worked at the PKK media and he interviewed me in
2013 for one and a half hours about the local groups. Then they interviewed me again in Brussels
and we arranged a journey afterwards to Rojava. I went in May 2014 with a friend of mine. As I
was the first one, they were very concerned that the news were spread. I had all the freedom to
speak and see whomever I wanted. I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. I went to all the
meetings, to the communes, etc. I met the top of the people of the PYD and the movement for a
democratic society and also from the bottom. I also went to events then. When I came back I wrote
a big report in English and Kurdish. However, when I came back the anarchist book fair took place
and the comrades organized a meeting at the anarchist and socialist movement. In 2016, I wanted to
go back to Rojava to feel the difference between 2014 and 2016 with a French comrade. We tried to
organize the border crossing but there was a blockade by the KDP of Barzani. In the end we had to
come back. Last year I went back to Kurdistan for one and a half months but I refused to go to
Rojava, as then I was supposed to follow the plan of the authorities, and to be honest at the moment
it is very difficult to write news about Rojava. Many people went and came back, but they usually
went as academics or as a delegation and they usually stay a week or a bit more, and whatever they
see was organized for them. They don’t really see or talk to the ordinary people. There are
exceptions, but only a few.

ARN: What can you tell us about the political situation now?

ZB: It is very complex and it can change week by week. There are so many forces there, which
makes it difficult to have a proper analysis. But one thing is very clear: when I was there, the
situation is completely different from now. At the time, there were three powers: the movement for
a democratic society, the self-administration, and the PYD. There was a balance between them.
Today, the PYD is the dominant actor. At the time, the YPJ was a voluntary force. It is very difficult
to properly analyze the development, because I wasn’t there all the time. What I saw so far is that
many people don’t realize what would be there to criticize. However, a few things are clear. At least
we can say some things about how Rojava is changing. There was a change in voluntary forces or
forces that belong to the community. Now, they are a PYD force and are not any more a defender
but became an attacker. All this actually happened because of the fight against ISIS. When they
attacked Kobani, there was a good moment for the US to get involved in order to control the
movement. The best way was to get involved in Kobani side by side with the PYD and YPG. By the
strategic change from a defense to an offensive force, they, the PYD and the YPG, needed more
weapons, more tanks and more hospitals, more food, more clothes, a lot of things. That’s why a
guerrilla force or any movement which has an army cannot do much until they are supported by an
original or international power if they are acting offensively. YPG completely became dependent on
the US, which tried to increase its influence.
ČL: How can people support your struggle and where can they find more information?

TA: So in terms of supporting the struggle at some point we’ll figure out how to properly how to get donations and figure that all out online. So that will be posted. We also very much need medical supplies, that’s one of the projects that we’re trying to work on right now is having competent combat medics. It’s something that’s very very needed here and the medical supplies are quite lacking so, you know, if people can donate things like chest seals, tourniquets, hemostatic dressing, a lot of these kinds of things are very much needed. In terms of finding more information, we’re really kind of starting to be public as I had said previously. So things are kind of going to come out over time, so I guess if you want to follow our twitter that’s the primary place that we will be posting everything. We’ve posted our involvement in Der ez-Zour, today we’ll post about the anniversary of Afrin and the actions that our people took in that. So, yeah, I guess follow our twitter for more information.

ČL: Okay, do you want to add something maybe?

TA: Obviously in Afrin there is consistently examples of people being kidnapped, people being sexually assaulted, people being murdered by the TFSA. There is ethnic cleansing happening in Afrin and if this continues, if the Turkish army is allowed to come in to Rojava the exact same thing is going to be happening. We have to dispel this narrative that, like, Turkey is fighting ISIS. Turkey has never fought ISIS, they never considered ISIS to be a threat when they were on their border. So with the Americans pulling out, with the defeat of ISIS, etc, is the trying time for Rojava. As I stated earlier, we cannot let what happened in Afrin happen to the rest of Rojava. The people in Rojava are living a decent life, a good life, and a safe life, comparatively. So I guess in summation what I want to say is that we need to be supporting Rojava right now, we need to be supporting the people of Rojava. We cannot let this just drift out of the 24-hour news cycle as some tragedy that’s happening somewhere else in the world that doesn’t effect us. This is an incredibly important thing and the Rojava project has provided people with a good life, with a safe life, within the Syrian civil war. So in terms of supporting the struggle at some point we’ll figure out how to properly how to get donations and figure that all out online.

ČL: How do you live and what is your connection to the Rojava revolution?

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Črna Luknja speaks with a Tekoşina Anarşişt combatant

A-Radio Network Announcers: We’re back in the studio in Turic, so it’s been quite a start, this fifth radio live anarchist broadcast from the gathering of different anarchist and anti-authoritarian radios. We know that in capitalist society class struggle is never far away so battlefields are opening up everywhere, so we will have also on today’s show some reports from France about Gilote Jaunes movement, we will hear from London by our correspondents from Dissident Island and we begin this section of the show with that other ever important struggle that has lightened up all sort of revolutionary imagination of many around the world and of course, Rojava. Territory in Syria that wasn’t widely known a couple of years ago but due to the actions of different political and even military forces and due to the revolutionary efforts of movements there, Rojava somehow became for us in Europe something, a recognizable entity for some fantasy, for others unfilled expectation, etc etc. So we will try to also add some more information, some analysis, some reflection to the understanding of ongoing struggles in and around Rojava so for today we will hear two pieces, two interviews.

So first one is an interview conducted by Črna Luknja with a fighter directly from Rojava. So the interview is a couple of weeks old, it deals with the latest geopolitical changes on the terrain that are connected with the recent announcement of the US president that USA would withdraw its military forces and then the other interview that will follow the first is also lets say, tries to critically engage with the common narratives around Rojava Revolution. So it will be an interview with a comrade from Kurdish Anarchist Forum and we should also add a technical remark that the interview was originally conducted in a language other than English, but for this purpose it was translated and then re-enacted. So, yeah. The content of the interview is true to the original even if the voices that you will hear do not belong to the people that were interviewed. So this Rojava slot will take maybe the next 25 minutes of the broadcast, so stay tuned, and inform yourself about the struggles and get ready to open up some battlefields also closer to home. More by Črna Luknja at http://radiostudent.si/dru%C5%BEba/%C4%8Drna-luknja

Črna Luknja: Rojava from Tekoşina Anarşişt, Anarchist Struggle collective that was established in autumn 2017 and just recently announced its military presence in Rojava. They are also participating in the International Freedom Battalion. For the beginning can you present yourself, anarchist collective and International Freedom Battalion.

Tekoşina Anarşişt Member: We’ve been in Rojava - I mean a lot of us have been in Rojava for a longer duration, a long period of time - but our collective was established in autumn of 2017 and we didn’t really want to become like a public, propaganda oriented collective. That was never our interest, we were more focused on doing, you know, material work in terms of going to the front and also engaging with the movement here. We decided to go public simply because of the impending Turkish threat, so everyone right now is kind of, you know, attempting to rally their base and our base is obviously anarchists. So we decided to go public because of that, as well as to some extent we were forced to go public because of the IBF formation, because we are a signing member of the IFB. And I don’t want to speak very much about IFB because they have not made their announcement yet and we prematurely mentioned our formation and we’ve received criticism for this. I don’t want to speak about the IFB very much until the formation has made itself public.

ČL: So it would be very interesting to get some news from within Rojava, what is current political situation there.

TA: I guess I’ll touch a little bit on the Turkey situation. Information here is difficult to come by, to some extent, so a lot of the stuff that we are made aware of actually comes from the internet as well, just following Syria Livemap and stuff like that. Obviously, we are, there has been two particular situations where based upon Erdogan’s threats that we believe that there was gonna be some sort of massive invasion of Rojava, so we’re obviously getting prepared for that, if that is a reality, if that’s going to happen. Things have a little bit seemed to kind of have calmed down but obviously that is a very tangible reality and something that could happen at any given moment so that we need to be prepared for.

ČL: Maybe you can predict some possible scenarios for the future.

TA: Yeah, I mean obviously Rojava and the PYD have been in negotiations with the regime for quite some time now, so hopefully they’re able to come to some sort of agreement. And I say ‘hopefully’ - obviously as anarchists we are not supportive of the Assad regime, we’re not supportive of any regime or any state, etc. - but in terms of survival it’s kind of the only way, as far as I see it, or we see it, in terms of being able to maintain some element of the revolution here. And in terms of scenarios of outcomes, if there is no deal with the regime I think it’ll be a very difficult situation for them to be in simply because not only will they then have to deal with Turkey but they’ll have to deal with attacks from the regime. So it’s a kind of indefensible position to be in if they don’t cut some sort of deal. I don’t want to say any sort of my predictions about the future of Rojava or anything like that. After Trump decided that he’s just gonna pull out of Syria, just, you know, I’ve kind of given up on making predictions because we’re dealing with irrational actors here. You know Erdogan is not necessarily a rational actor and Trump is definitely not a rational actor so it’s very difficult to make accurate predictions, what’s going to transpire here.

ČL: I don’t know how much you are able to be in contact with the society, how is in general the situation, how is living for the population there?

TA: The good thing is that we are able to have contact with people from like the general population, in fact we have a good friend of ours who is Assyrian, he speaks perfect English and he learned it primarily through American hip-hop which is a kind of interesting thing. And he’s given us a little bit of light into more of the civilian population here. I mean, a lot of people are obviously incredibly supportive of like the YPC, the QSD [SDF], YPJ, etc. But a lot of people, especially people who are not Kurdish, are not aware of exactly what’s happening, you know, because it’s a very complicated situation. They’ve had al-Nusra come through, they’ve had ISIS come through, they’ve had different groups and a lot of people aren’t actually inexplicably familiar with what you know, YPG, YPJ, the revolution, etc. is but they view it very favorably for sure. I mean, when you have something like ISIS, like al-Nusra or TFSA or something like that, you know obviously people are going to prefer the alternatives. Personally I think that there is a lot of education and communication that needs to happen with the population here simply because they don’t know what is going on, or why internationals are here. They kind of want to go back to their normal life, they don’t want this war to be happening. They really just want security.