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Environment

Campaign for ecological development in Rojava

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At the last Fourth International youth camp, the question of concrete solidarity and support for our comrades in Syria was raised, a question which is often raised inside the Fourth International alongside our political evaluation and analysis. In Denmark, one of our long time comrades has been involved in direct solidarity work and, inspired by this I have written this article to explain this initiative.

Through enormous sacrifices, the Kurdish people have liberated large areas in the North West of Syria , (which they call Rojava) from the stranglehold of Daesh and the Syrian state. The bitter struggles around the Kurdish town Kobane that was liberated in January 2015 are the best known of these sacrifices. During the withdrawal, ISIS destroyed everything. Towns, fields, agricultural equipment and seed has been destroyed, burned down in order to make reconstruction more difficult.

Now these areas are being rebuilt. Several projects have been launched in order to assist the population in the liberated areas to rise again. German activists have collected to start to build a hospital in Kobane. Danish activists have assisted, among other things, by donating important hospital equipment. School projects have been started around Kobane - a minimum of 10 schools including school gardens, cooperatives, several with a specific women/feminist perspective in order to further economic independence of women which can be seen [here](#).

In August of 2016, a university was opened in the capital Qamishli in Cezire Canton, which collaborates with, amongst others. with the university Paris 8. [\[1\]](#).

But there is still a long way to go.

The Kurdish liberated areas suffer from a very damaging trade embargo from all their neighbours – Turkey, Iraq and Daesh/Assad in Syria. For eighteen months, consequently, it has been almost impossible to trade commodities, to send post and emergency aid or to enter the liberated areas. As the Assad regime controls all Kurdish passports, people are prevented from traveling to establish collaboration/trade with other countries.

In order for the reconstruction to succeed, it is essential that agriculture and food production is started as soon as possible. Production fell dramatically because of a wide spread shortage of fertilizers and pesticides. Conversion to ecological cultivation methods could give higher yields as would the use of untilled land. This would also create greater independence from Rojava's reactionary neighbours and their embargoed goods.

The Kurdish authorities have, despite the enormous challenges, declared that they want to further a change to ecological sustainable agricultural production.

An ecological agricultural school project

An international and Danish reconstruction project is focusing on furthering the development of ecological agriculture in Rojava.

In August 2015, an initiating group of Danish ecologists, sympathizers and Kurds initiated a

Danish/Kurdish/international Solidarity and Support Association; "Ecological Rojava" which works to further an international ecological agricultural school project in Rojava. The agriculture School has several elements and partial projects:

- Building an agricultural school in Rojava in the long term.
- Planting trees and berry producing bushes for shelter s in drought stricken grain producing areas.
- Assisting the development of a Kurdish-speaking ecological agricultural education in Rojava for instance by furthering international academic collaboration of ecological knowledge and methods.
- exchange of knowledge about work environment, sustainable energy and cooperatives.
- Helping produce ecological quality food which could be sold locally.
- Participating in giving inspiration in collaboration with other liberated Kurdish cantons on the development of ecological agriculture.

The school must support the education of ecological farmers in the area so that they can later start their own local ecological farms or cooperatives.

The trip to Rojava May 2017

To establish a network in Rojava and further the development of the agricultural school project, two people from "Ecological Rojava" went on a trip to Rojava for a week in May 2017. They undertook the journey with a Danish/Kurdish doctor and nurse, who provided a sizeable amount of medical equipment for the Kurdish hospitals in Rojava.

"Ecological Rojava" visited several Kurdish authorities, agricultural commissions, the university in Qamishli and local farmers to present the idea of attempting the development of ecological farming and in the long term, an ecological agricultural school. Even though the ruling political parties, such as PYD (the Democratic Unity Party) and authorities on the highest level want ecological change, a fundamental knowledge of ecological cultivation methods and techniques are absent; even at university level in Rojava.

We stayed in a rehabilitation centre/military hospital approximately 2 km from the Turkish border. The centre received mentally or physically wounded soldiers (soldiers in the sense of those involved in guerrilla warfare) from the Kurdish self-defence forces, YPG and YPJ (the women's organisation). At the rehabilitation centre, the less unfortunate soldiers assisted those who were badly wounded under medical supervision of a doctor in the production of plaster and wooden artificial limbs for hands, arms and legs lost in combat. They also helped each other training in the use of these new limbs. Additionally, a psychologist worked at the centre to relieve trauma. Everybody wore uniforms, except the psychologist. They also had small vegetable gardens the wounded soldiers could look after during their convalescence.

Many of the young wounded soldiers were in the early twenties and had no family; their parents had disappeared, been imprisoned in Turkey or other places. Some had joined the YPG to participate in the struggle against

intolerance and Islamic State's atrocities, for freedom, internationalism, the right to free cultural structures, democracy and socialism.

Although they did find time for humour and laughter, there was an aura around them of restrained seriousness and sorrow, rooted in their personal stories. As a 24-year-old soldier, whose wife had been killed at a rally right in front of him by the Turkish military in their hometown, with a small tear in one eye, quietly remarked at midnight before he left our room with his rifle on his shoulder for a mission: "War sucks!" The YPG and the Kurdish democratic project had become his family.

The distance between these young soldier's stories/reality and the Turkish, Saudi Arabian and Western media's one-eyed and stereotyped need to depict impoverished Kurds at the bottom of society as dangerous terrorists is immense. Unfortunately, the Kurdish hospitals lack much necessary medicine and medical equipment that our western NATO-allies, ISIS and Northern Iraq's embargoes keep out.

Democracy in Rojava

The concept of "Democratic Confederalism" that the Kurds have developed and fight for has an anarchistic history from the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. Today it has the practical consequence of approximately 500 autonomous local "basic popular assemblies" of not more than 200 participants who control and defend themselves. Local assemblies elect delegates for the next autonomous "town popular assembly" – level, where they elect delegates for "city- and district popular assemblies" which elect - as the final level – delegates for the three autonomous cantons of Afrin, Kobane and Cizire. Otherwise, there is no national state. The capital Qamishli is in the autonomous canton Cizire.

The concept of "Democratic Confederalism" has an in-built idea of basic democracy, ethnic diversity and feminist approach to the organisation of society, citizen's influence and leadership practise. As was the case during the Paris Commune, the delegates can be withdrawn and they are not paid for their participation in the democratic system – not even at the highest level.

As we all know, all the posts in the leadership have a double function? – at least: male and female and usually ethnic co-leadership too. We encountered this type of democratic structure in all the committees, canton parliaments etc. we met. We also met a female leader from a non-socialist party who obviously had an entirely different vision for Rojava than PYD's socialist position, but she told us that she could participate in the democratic forums, like everybody else.

These reflections from one week's stay should of course not to be taken as the only truth. Many things that we may not have grasped, can have taken place. Nevertheless, the various political representatives we met confirmed these experiences.

Just like PYD's support according to their own statements varies from 50 – 60 percent in the various autonomous cantons, depending on the different populations groups' positions, maturity etc. They state that Barzani's sister party in Syria - that cooperates with Barzani's non-socialist Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in Northern Iraq, and with the Turks in Northern Iraq that are behind the trade embargo against Rojava and allows the Turks to bomb PKK in Iraq, instead of helping their Kurdish brothers and sisters, are represented with various degrees of strength in the three cantons. That the KPD, which is completely corrupt in Iraq, operates in Syria and governs the federal provinces in Northern Iraq with economic support from Turkey, is allowed to participate in the various popular assemblies in Rojava does say something about the democratic disposition of PYD. Hundreds of arguments for proven injurious activities supported by the KDP are available, but this hasn't led to their expulsion from democratic Rojava. This

autumn there are new rounds of elections to the various autonomous popular assemblies and areas. It is going to be interesting to see how the relative strength in Rojava may have moved and which political projects it will evolve when, before long, ISIS is chased out of Raqqa.

We talked to international activists, who had travelled from, for instance, Denmark or the USA to Rojava to support the Kurdish troops for self-defence, the YPG that involves many different ethnic groups and sacrifices life and livelihood to liberate Kurds and other ethnic or religious groups (Assyrians, Arabs, Christian Yezidis etc.) and defend the democratic construction of the areas. After a brief trainee period of a month, with only a small focus on the military part, foreign supporters are placed in different parts of the self-defence troops according to their wishes, if they have any.

When we drove through the capital, Qamishli, by night, there were no traffic lights or street lamps, but out of the dark by every crossing a number of AK-47-armed Asayish (local security troops) appeared— quite undramatically – and made sure that the drivers had peaceful intentions. Our own chauffeurs – who also carried an AK-47 – greeted their comrades undramatically, so that we could move around effortlessly. This was a hugely peaceful experience in a region, where obviously the entire society is in a state of military alert due to the war just a few hundred kilometres away. By the frontier, 20.000 SDF soldiers (Syrian Democratic Forces) under the leadership of YPG had just recently won a battle for the extremely important town, Al Tabqa and the Euphrat dam, which was the last big ISIS-town before the ISIS-stronghold Raqqa. The battle of Raqqa has been going on for a while and SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) are mobilising to send in nearly 35.000 soldiers (more or less half their troops) while I write these lines. The Kurds make these sacrifices, even though Al Tabqa and Raqqa are quite a distance from the traditional Kurdish areas in Rojava!

The Kurdish project in Rojava has, during the revolution, developed to incorporate political visions and democratic structures that reach far outside the “traditional Kurdish areas.” The visions of feminism, ecological change and democratic confederalism (originally an American/anarchist influence on Abdullah Öcalan who is held by the Turkish state on the prison island, Imrali and subsequently on the PKK and PYD in Rojava) has now become a common unifying vision and perspective for many of the conflicts in the Middle East if you ask the ideologists in PYD. The vision is not particularly Kurdish, but can embrace all oppressed ethnic groups and persons. It will be interesting to see if “democratic confederalism” can be established in areas where the Kurds are small minorities in comparison with other ethnic groups and what Assad will come up with when the fights die down and he maybe gets the opportunity to regain power over larger areas in Syria.

We gave presentations about cooperatives and Danish experiences with the development of co-operative agricultural companies in different agricultural commissions in Rojava and presented short videos about mechanical weed control in Danish ecological fields. We also established some ecological farming to test the use of nitrogen fixing crops in the university garden, since the ecological plant based fertilising principles are virtually unknown in Rojava. We are planning a new visit later this year to develop further our cooperation in Rojava, visit and document other attempts with ecological change from international activists in the liberated areas and launch more eco-field projects.

Our parallel work with the development of an international academic network at university level between Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France and Qamishli is essential for the accumulation of knowledge and farming techniques for ecological agriculture in Rojava and for it to spread in society subsequently.

Join the campaign!

We made half of a documentary on our trip to Rojava, which is now part of the information- and solidarity work in

Campaign for ecological development in Rojava

Denmark, Sweden and Germany. Teasers are available in Danish and English at our [website](#) and on [Facebook](#) .

Everybody who wants take part in building up one or more of these solidarity projects is very welcome to join the campaign. For instance, our organisation needs people with fundraising, social media and international campaign as well as international academic networking skills.

All national as well as international activists who wish to support a sustainable development of ecological agriculture and renewable energy in Rojava can become members of "Ecological Rojava" for 200 kr./27 Euro per 6 months by depositing the money in "Merkur Andelskasse": reg.: 8401 Account No.: 1268160.

Learn more about the project at the [English website here](#).

Contact: JÃ_rgen Holst, Tel.: 0045 71 48 46 65. Jholst4@outlook.dk,
Ecological farmer, Enhedslisten/FI-Denmark

PS:

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[1] <http://aranews.net/2016/08/rojava-u...>