

Interview with the International Revolutionary People's Guerrilla Forces

Kurdish Question

01/05/2017

The first anarchist battalion has been launched in Rojava, and with that a new call for revolutionary anarchists from around the world to join them. Rojava Solidarity NYC (RS NYC) conducted an interview with the members of the International Revolutionary People's Guerrilla Forces (IRPGF) about how they got started, how they have experienced revolutionary life and the possibilities for anarchists when an autonomous region supports the movement.

What made you decide to come to Rojava?

We decided to come to Rojava to defend the ongoing social revolution unfolding here and in the broader region. We wanted to support the revolution not only with words and with solidarity events but with our physical presence and our lives. The revolution's primary focus on women's liberation and ecology are vital to any liberatory revolution and thus something we not only support and defend but also seek to spread. Additionally, we wanted to learn as much as we could about tactics and practices from the various militant Apoist and communist parties as well as create a space for anarchist militants in the revolution.

How do you see your role in Rojava? And has it changed over the course of each member's involvement, from arriving to forming this collective?

Our role in Rojava is first and foremost to help defend and ensure the success of the revolution on both a social and military level. Secondly, our role includes spreading anarchist principles and theory through education programs and exchanges with local communes and collectives. We see ourselves here in Rojava as a constitutive part of the project of democratic confederalism and we carry out whatever work is necessary to achieve the project's revolutionary goals and aims. While we all came here with these ideals and principles, the longer we have stayed the more we have seen and understood the richness and complexity of the revolution and the people, not only in an analytic sense but also in an emotional sense. For example, here we have gained a new understanding of comradeship that would have never developed in individualistic societies. This has allowed our understanding of the revolution to be much more nuanced and comprehensive than any armchair revolutionary attempting to critique from afar.

What are the characteristics or practices you've found in Rojava that exemplify the revolution for you?

One of the main characteristics and practices that exemplify the revolution and its ideals include the Tekmil, which is the term for the revolutionary practice of criticism and self-criticism implemented into the PKK by Öcalan and now used in revolutionary institutions in both the social and military spheres. The teknil is used for several purposes: to ensure that people are continuously improving themselves and their relationships with those around them, as a means of resolving differences and tensions in a healthy and effective way, to keep the goals of a shared revolutionary horizon at the forefront of the struggle, and to restrict hierarchical relationships from forming within autonomous groups. Other main characteristics include collective life, women's empowerment and defense, people's defense, pluralism (religious, ethnic), efforts to bridge ethnic conflicts (reconciliation), and politics being an integral part of life for many. All of these characteristics have worked together to enable a heterogeneous population of human beings to not only liberate and defend themselves but also confront and work to reconcile conflicts that threaten their own solidarity. To us, this type of continual struggle to advance the emancipation of all is what it means to be revolutionary.

How do you see the Rojava Revolution in relation to anarchist struggles around the world?

The Rojava Revolution, much like the revolution in Chiapas in the 90's, is one of indigenous peoples not only standing up against colonizers and imperialists, but also seeking to transcend capitalism and the nation-state. The Rojava Revolution and its principles are in line with those of anarchism and provides hope to other indigenous communities around the world who are co-struggling against their oppression and for their liberation. For example, Şehîd Kawa Amed was a native American and NoDAPL activist who traveled to Rojava to show his solidarity with the revolution and ultimately give his life for the cause. It is people like this who reveal the interconnectedness of indigenous and anarchist struggles around the world and fill us with the inspiration and determination to keep the struggle alive.

What are the larger goals of this organization?

Beyond supporting and defending the revolution in Rojava, we as IRPGF seek to advance the cause of anarchism around the world and continue the armed struggle until world revolution. In the meantime, we aim to create a training base in the region explicitly for anarchists to come, train, and prepare for the revolution both here and on their home fronts. We hope that this base will serve as a collective space where anarchists can come to learn a variety of revolutionary skills, spanning from the social to the guerrilla. Additionally, with the creation of this group, we aim to inspire more anarchists to come to the region and show physical solidarity for the revolution. For those anarchists that are unable to come for reasons outside their control, we hope that they can still support us and the revolutionary movements around the world through local solidarity actions and other creative means.

What would be the ideal outcomes for IRPGF?

Ideal outcomes first include the success of the revolution in Rojava and the spread of anarchist revolution and insurrection in every neighborhood around the world. Additionally, an anarchist base that can act as a center for revolutionary living and training for the foreseeable future would also be ideal. See you all in Rojava.

How did you come to the conclusion to make this group?

During the Spanish Civil War, tens of thousands of international volunteers and revolutionaries traveled to Spain from as far as China to show their solidarity and give their lives for a revolution that unfortunately proved to be unsuccessful. During the Syrian Civil War today, less

than a thousand international revolutionaries have come to support and defend the ongoing social revolution in Rojava. We asked ourselves — how could it be that in the age of the Internet, air travel, and a thus vastly interconnected world was there such a lack of substantial international solidarity. We have heard criticisms from those who pay lip service to the Spanish Civil War, yet attempt to shame those that travel to Rojava with terms such as adventurists, imperialists, racists, and more. However, it is precisely those who level such critiques and do not show their physical solidarity here in Rojava who are the real racists, islamophobes, and imperialists. Instead of risking their comfort, privilege, and craft beer, they remain on their cushions, enjoying the material comforts provided by the imperialist and colonialist powers that have created the fascist monsters in this region. Thus, we came to the conclusion to make this group in order to fill the vacuum left by the anarchists who had yet to do so.

Have there been any particular scenes or anecdotes that have reaffirmed your impressions of or commitments to the revolutionary project in Rojava?

One of the most vivid scenes occurred when one of our comrades was staying with a family and a woman of the family began to tell our comrade about her experience with receiving education from and getting involved with the Mala Jin. She related how it changed her life, how she was able to revolutionize her perception of herself as a human being, and how a world of possibilities had opened up for her. Her eyes while discussing this are something that our comrade will never forget. Still, our comrade notes that one mostly experiences the revolutionary spirit in day to day life and those moments of true liberation don't come from the institutions that have been set up but from the cultural changes that have occurred, which are almost impossible to capture with words.

Another event occurred on the eve of Nevroz. During the night, the city streets were full of fires usually consisting of burning tires. People were gathered around them chanting, singing and dancing. This was the day that for decades had been repressed and forbidden for Kurds in Syria and Turkey. Now it was celebrated openly as a day of cultural expression and liberation with great joy and excitement. While we were riding around the city in our pick up truck waving, shouting and occasionally shooting off AK's with our comrades, a large convoy of cars appeared. They were packed with people who were hanging out the windows and even on the roofs of the vehicles waving flags, chanting and shouting. Some were shooting tracer rounds from their weapons since there were no fireworks for the festivities. We quickly pulled into the convoy and drove around the city for hours honking the horn, waving to the people gathered on the streets or looking from their balconies and windows and blasting revolutionary music. During the evening we stumbled upon a large fire with many young children holding hands, jumping up and down while singing and dancing. In front of the fire was a group of young girls of all ages holding their hands up in the victory symbol and jumping up and down shouting "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi!" or "Women, Life, Freedom!" Some of our comrades got emotional as the girls shouted with such joy and freedom. One comrade looked over and said that even if the revolution is defeated, it would not have been in vain for this was the revolution victorious.

Lastly, a scene that cannot be left unmentioned is that of one of the şehîd ceremonies (essentially a funeral) for one international and two local comrades. Even though it was just two people from the region that had passed, the entire village and surrounding villages came to the ceremony. All of the people came with their various YPG, YPJ, and related flags, all while yelling powerful chants of 'Şehîd Namirin! (Martyrs don't die!) and 'Bi can, bi xwîn, em bi te re ne ey şehîd! (With soul, with blood, we are with you şehîd!') They came together, cried together, and experienced

the death of a loved one together. This is due to the fact that death is still a very communal event here; people know that a death in the community does not just affect the individual, rather it affects everyone as each individual makes up part of the whole. Further, they understand the need for physical solidarity with each other, which was thoroughly exemplified by the attendance of the HPC, or the community defense militias — consisting mainly of women ready to help defend their community from anyone that attempts to infringe on its autonomy, whether it be daîş, the asayîş, or even the YPG. Scenes and anecdotes such as these not only remind us why we fight and but also fill us with hope that the revolution will both continue to flourish in the region and spread to the rest of the world.

What do you see as the greatest threat to the revolution?

The greatest threats to the revolution comes from various fronts: counterrevolutionary forces; imperialist forces and/or colonial forces such as Turkey, USA, Assad, Russia, Iran, and Barzani — KDP/ENKS; religious/ethnic sectarianism; and a liberal, statist outcome of the revolution. As individual anarchists and as a collective under the name IRPGF, we will combat these threats and do everything possible to ensure their destruction if they take a strike at the revolution. For any anarchist interested in becoming a part of IRPGF, this is a prerequisite.

How would you like to position IRPGF in relation to struggles internationally?

IRPGF: From Chile to Greece, anarchist groups have risen and answered the call of armed struggle. In other areas where armed struggle is not yet possible, anarchists have creatively developed infrastructure and projects that truly address social issues when no one else would. We see ourselves as a part of these larger anarchist movements and we extend our support and solidarity to the anarchists who currently struggle both in and outside of the confines of the state. We also honor and praise the brave anarchists around the world who have given their lives to defeat oppression in all of its forms. In the long term, we hope to create a network of armed anarchist groups around the world who can jointly struggle against capitalism and the state.

Did coming to Rojava change how you see the nature of the anarchist struggle?

IRPGF: Anarchist struggle without praxis is not struggle. Therefore, with a unified understanding of theory and praxis necessary for revolution, we have seen how taking up arms changes the struggle and our relationship to it and to one another. The severe lack of international anarchist support is both shameful and indicative of a larger problem within the anarchist movement — the unwillingness to truly put one's life on the line for the struggle. Thus, beyond all the self deception, delusion and congratulatory anarchist politics is the very truth of the struggle; that in order to change the world one must be willing to risk their lives, their comfort and their privilege. What this entails is of course relative to the area you are organizing in. For example, if people in your area are experiencing heavy ICE raids, begin sabotaging these raids by any means possible. If mosques are being attacked by far right extremists, form groups to help prevent such attacks and expel fascists from the area. Pick up a gun if necessary. Stand in front of a gun if necessary. If one is not ready to do this, they, in our opinion, cannot call themselves a revolutionary.

What sorts of skills and practices would you recommend anarchist revolutionaries develop to help them further the struggle?

IRPGF: Considering that revolution will contain both social and military aspects, we suggest that to prepare adequately and further the struggle, people must learn to live communally and develop the skills to carry out armed struggle. This is precisely the reason we see it as imperative that we create a base in the region for anarchists to travel to and do just that.

There are many groups around the world right now hoping to bring the practices of the Rojava Revolution back home. What sort of advice would you give them?

First, some advice is to be aware of the local contexts and develop programs specific to not only the current but historical local contexts. Second, to defeat the imposed alienation of both the State and Capital, it is important to find a way to develop means of spending time with each other that create and maintain truly revolutionary relationships. Experiencing life communally is an essential part of existing in Rojava and a key factor in the people's ability to continually rise up and defend each other when necessary. People here care about those around them in a much deeper sense than the capitalist concept of simply scratching each other's backs. To recreate this sense of community in Western societies we will first need to revolutionize ourselves and our relationships with each other. Call outs on social media need to be done away with. Baseless egos and smugness need to be done away with. Those attitudes have done nothing but further stagnate the movement. Bring yourself back down to the level of those around you, begin to perceive the movement as more than just something to boost your self-esteem, and struggle. Until this is done, a revolution will not be possible. So, spend time with each other. If you see problems in your comrades' behavior, address them as a group that cares about each other's improvement as revolutionary human beings, rather than taking it to Facebook and denouncing them publicly. Create groups that enable people to begin to rely on each other again instead of the State. Get to know your neighbors and their problems. Don't think of yourself as better or separate from the general populous, as a real revolution needs to flow up from the people. Hold neighborhood assemblies that allow for projects to develop around local needs and put your lives on the line for others. Develop decentralized defense militias that can go to war with the State and its lackeys (cops, boneheads, etc.). In short, this is a time in the West when anarchism may either succeed or fail completely and the path it will take is in all of our hands.

What are the best ways for people back home to join in your mission and support your work?

Of course, the best way for anarchists back home to join in our mission and work would be to come to Rojava and join the struggle directly. However, we are well aware that this is not possible for everyone and understand the need for ways to support us from afar. One simple yet crucial way to do so would be to join or create a local Rojava Solidarity group and help fund raise for our military and medical supplies. Bleeding out is the number one killer here and blood coagulates such as cellox are unfortunately in short supply. That and generally spreading awareness about the revolution and anarchist participation in it would be very helpful. Of course, continuing to advance the anarchist movement in your own neighborhoods and fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with the oppressed wherever you are will help the overarching mission and work of anarchism as well.

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