

AVAŞİN

newsletter

MAY 2024



PEOPLE'S BRIDGE



MAY 1

Labor Day in North and East Syria

2024 marks the first year in which May 1, Labor Day, was declared a public holiday in North and East Syria. In preparation for May Day, the *Revolutionary Communist Movement* (TKŞ) organized panel events in various cities, including Hesekê, Kobanê and Dirbêsêy, and distributed flyers to workers in the cities and visited them in their workplaces, factories and workshops. The workers were called upon to join the events on May Day. On the day itself TKŞ organized a celebration in the forest of Kobanê. In the opening speech, Kurdistan, the workers and the oppressed were celebrated. It was emphasized that it is the task of the workers, women and youth to organize themselves in the ranks of the Rojava revolution and to defend it. An open-air event took place in the Serdem camp in the canton of Efrîn-Şehba.

The co-chair of TEV-DEM in Efrîn-Şehba, Şêrîn Hesên, said in a speech: “May Day is a day of resistance and sacrifice fought for by workers. Work is the basis of society, working people are the essence of a community.”

In Kobanê, thousands of people took part in the May Day celebrations. May Day was celebrated in a cheerful atmosphere on Şehîd-Egîd Square. Commemorations also took place in the cities of Raqqa, Minbic and Tebqa. In Minbic, the co-chair of the Minbic Canton Workers Union emphasized “We will definitely build a democratic nation with the power of the workers. We promise to face all dangers and obstacles.”



POLITICS

Local elections and the political system in North and East Syria

The Democratic Local Government of North and East Syria announced at the beginning of the year that local elections were scheduled for May (on May 11 it was announced that the elections would be postponed to June 11).

At the end of last year, the local government verified the new social contract, which is effectively a constitution. The aim of the local elections is to elect new local councils and their co-chairs. The election of co-chairs is based on parity—at least one person in the chair must be a woman.

The political system of self-government

The political system of self-government is based on a trio consisting of the self-government with its councils, the Syrian Democratic Council and the civil society organization TEV-DEM.

In the following, we give a brief outline of the democratic system of self-government.

1. Self-government

The aim of self-government is to shape people's everyday lives in a grassroots democratic manner. The municipality is the central element of democracy. Municipalities usually consist of 30 to 150 households and organize daily life. Each commune has an equal number of co-chairs and various committees/offices, for example in the village commune of Carudi. Carudi is a village that has a very active commune whose members meet monthly and plan activities together according to their needs, for example, some jointly cultivated agricultural land and the construction and management of a recreational community garden are the work of this actively working commune. The collective fields are cultivated by cooperatives and the total product, the harvest, is then shared among all the people of Carudi. If, for example, the need for new street-

lights arises in a community, this need is either submitted in writing to the designated office or mentioned at a community meeting. The local authority then takes care of the next steps, including resolving conflict situations within and between families. There is also the neighborhood council, local council and city council. Upwards, the councils represent more and more people, e.g. the members of a city council represent the interests of the neighborhoods and localities. The union of several regions/districts is made possible by the cantonal system, i.e. the cantons are the sum of all councils and are administered by the cantonal people's council—the highest council of self-government. It passes laws and controls public order. There are a total of 7 cantons in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria: Afrîn (despite the occupation by Islamist-Turkish militias in 2018, the self-administration continues its work in self-established camps for people from Afrin), Manbij, Tabqa, Euphrates, Rakka, Jazeera and Deir ez-Zor. The people's council members are elected every four years (those of the municipalities, for example, every two years) and all council levels set up committees/offices according to their needs, e.g. an agricultural office makes more sense in a rural council than in a city council. In general, an education office, reconciliation and justice office and a women's office can be set up. There are currently 9 different office options and the councils strengthen and protect society, ensure its continuity and ensure the implementation of its goals in political, social, cultural and economic areas. 60% of the candidates for the councils are elected directly by the people, with the remaining 40% earmarked for seats for ethnic-religious groups. This is intended to guarantee the participation of minorities.

2. The Syrian Democratic Council

The Syrian Democratic Council (founded in 2015) is a parliamentary institution that provides a political framework for resolving the Syrian conflict through talks with organizations/people/parties in Syria as a whole and represents the self-administration in foreign policy matters relating to diplomacy, with the aim of finding a democratic confederal solution for Syria as a whole - in opposition to Assad's Baath Party.

Both the SDR and the self-administration report to each other and consult with each other. Representatives of over 20 different parties sit in parliament. There are two large alliances: on the one hand, the so-called "democratic nation/TEV-DEM" around left-wing forces such as the PYD and the ENKS (Kurdish National Council), which is close to Barzanî.

3. TEV-DEM and Kongreya-Star

The civil society umbrella organization, TEV-DEM, was founded in 2011. It represents the interests of society vis-à-vis the self-administration. TEV-DEM does not see itself as an opponent of the self-administration, but rather as a counter-power. It is, for

example, in charge of trade union work to educate the people and promote the organized participation of the revolution. All civil society criticisms are collected, evaluated and presented to the self-administration by TEV-DEM— with the request to implement these criticisms. “But if the local government does not listen to us, we will send a strong message— we will start an uprising” — Zelal Jeger, KO chairman of TEV-DEM.

The Kongreya Star is an autonomous women’s committee of TEV-DEM. Kongreya Star deals with the problems of women, initially in the Kurdish areas, but with the spread of the revolution the character of the movement changed and it became multi-ethnic. One of the most important achievements of the revolution is that there are additional autonomous women’s organizations at all levels— whether municipalities, trade unions or militias. There is a co-chair and a women’s committee in every council. The practice of the Kongreya Star includes, for example, organizing demonstrations for women’s interests.

Challenges of the council system

The system of municipalities and councils requires a high degree of participation of the people and the political subjects of the revolution come from a long tradition of the centralist Syrian state, where officials administered the state and made policy over the heads of the people on a daily basis. Since the revolution, the situation has changed dramatically, the SDF has seized the resulting power vacuum in the region and moved towards a grassroots democratic system. There are municipalities that work in a very organized way, and in other places there are municipalities that have not yet really arrived in the new system. If the political understanding of the municipalities and councils were higher, the number of municipalities would also be smaller; currently, a municipality consists of 30-150 families. The original target for the communes was up to 150 people. There is a possibility that in the low-organized communes, the responsibility will be shifted to the shoulders of the co-chairs, which would result in people mistakenly seeing the co-chair as the equivalent of civil servants as in the former Syria.



KOBANÊ TRIALS

“Those who resist have the last word, yesterday and today”

When the so-called Islamic State advanced to Kobanê in 2014, the President of Turkey, Erdogan, announced: “Kobanê is about to fall.” However, the Kurdish and internationalist fighters in particular waged a heroic battle for Kobanê and managed to inflict the first major military defeat on Daesh. As the fierce battle for Kobanê unfolded and thousands of people in the city of Kobanê were on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe, the Turkish state simply looked on and hoped for a victory for Daesh— which it also supported logistically for years. At this time, many progressive forces and politicians called for solidarity with the Kobanê resistance— including the pro-Kurdish HDP leadership (*Peoples’ Democratic Party*, founded in 2012 following the decision of the HDK– the *Democratic Congress of Peoples*– in 2012 as a merger of many pro-Kurdish left-wing, socialist parties and organizations). “Urgent call to our peoples [...]! The situation in Kobanê is extremely critical. We call on our peoples to take to the streets and support those who are already on the streets to protest against the Daesh attacks and the AKP government’s embargo!” read the HDP’s Twitter post at the time, which is considered to have triggered the proceedings. In the course of the solidarity demonstrations and some of the resulting street battles, more than 30 people were murdered by the Turkish state, its paramilitary ally in the form of village protectors and the Islamists of the Hüda-Par. At the latest after the historic electoral success of the HPD in the 2015 parliamentary elections, Turkish fascism went on the offensive and gradually gave prison sentences to the entire political leadership of the HDP in order to turn the party into a toothless tiger. Today, almost ten years later, the show trials surrounding the so-called Kobanê trial have ended and many Kobanê-solidary politicians have been sentenced to draconian prison terms. The former co-chairs of the HDP, Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, received prison sentences of over 30 and 40 years respectively, and with these heavy sentences the Turkish state is trying to silence the two politicians who declared war on Turkish chauvinism in order to weaken the entire pro-Kurdish

movement within parliament. Among others, the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) criticized the show trials and emphasized that the trials against Demirtas and Yüksekdağ were sham trials against the pro-Kurdish forces in the country. However, there were also many protests against the sentences; people took to the streets in many places to show solidarity with the prisoners and to show the Turkish state that resistance cannot be broken by imprisoning politicians. The Turkish state is currently waging a three-front war against Kurdistan—at home with the Kobanê trial against the pro-Kurdish forces, in North and East Syria against the revolution and in southern Kurdistan against the guerrillas. Our task is to unite the resistance on all fronts in order to burn Turkish fascism, which is playing with fire, once and for all. Just as the guerrillas are currently fighting against Turkish fascism and its collaborators in the Medya Defense Areas, just as the people of the revolution of North and East Syria are fighting against the Turkish siege and just as Northern Kurdistan is fighting against the AKP government's attempts at trusteeship, we too must face the struggle with determination and stand up to Turkish fascism wherever we encounter it, as Figen Yüksekdağ has already said: "Those who resist have the last word, yesterday and today."



Women's structures in North and East Syria

The revolutionary areas in North and East Syria have been under constant attack since their creation. Be it by DAESH, the Al Nusra Front (al-Qaeda branch in Syria) or, above all, the Turkish state. A particularly frequent target of these attacks are the pioneers of Rojava's women's movement. In April of this year alone, the YPJ commanders Zozan Heskê and Sorxwîn Celal were murdered by Turkish drone attacks.

Both were key figures in the establishment of the women's defense units and were instrumental in the fight against and victory over DAESH. An attack on them is a direct attack on the numerous achievements that the women of Rojava have been able to fight for in the past 11 years of revolution.

The Rojava Revolution is often referred to as a "women's revolution", i.e. a revolution that places a special focus on the liberation of women and the associated complete overcoming of patriarchy. This is based on the analysis that patriarchy, as the oldest system of oppression in human history, leaves deep traces in the very personality of people and does not simply die away through national liberation or socialist revolution. The subjects of the women's revolution are, of course, women, because just as the bourgeoisie cannot liberate the proletariat, or does not want to, neither can men liberate women.

For this reason, the women of Rojava have created many organizations for their liberation in the past 11 years, as well as in the many years before the revolution. Organizations that continue to advance women's liberation in all areas and defend the achievements of the women's revolution against reactionary forces of all kinds. Just as these organizations are central to the revolution in Rojava, an understanding of these

organizations is central to anyone who wants to understand the revolution as a whole. Basically, it can be said that there are autonomous women's organizations in every area and at every level in Rojava, which work closely with the mixed-gender organizations but are not organizationally dependent on them. They ensure that the women's voice cannot be ignored in any decision. In this article, we will focus on the various women's defense structures in memory of the fallen women commanders.

The most famous women's organization in Rojava is probably the YPJ, the Women's Defense Units (Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Jin), which gained worldwide fame through its pioneering role in the fight against DAESH. To this day, the YPJ is mainly made up of Kurds, but more and more people are also joining in the Arab areas of the self-administration, which were only later liberated from the clutches of the fascist Islamist militia. Since the Kurdish freedom movement has been working in the Kurdish cities for over forty years, but in the Arab cities only since their liberation, in some cases since just five years, it is only logical that the ideology of the women's revolution is not yet so deeply anchored in the Arab regions. This is precisely the focus of the women's movement– the expansion of the women's revolution in all liberated areas. It was the YPJ units that, through their victory over Daesh, made it possible for this ideology to appeal to and inspire ever broader sections of the Arab population. In addition to the classic military tasks, the YPJ also fulfills another important role in society, namely as a safe place where women living in oppressive family situations and under constant domestic violence can flee to and be protected. Here the role of the YPJ in women's liberation becomes particularly clear: by joining the YPJ, women first liberate themselves from unbearable oppression and then work within the military structures to liberate all women.

Despite everything, the main task of the YPJ is that of an army, i.e. the defense of Rojava against external enemies, even if, as explained, it also takes on social tasks and its mere existence has considerably improved the position of women within North and East Syria. However, the defense of women within society is largely taken over by other structures such as the Asayîşa Jin (women's security forces).

The Asayîş (internal security) mainly take on police duties. The Asayîşa Jin, as a women's organization, places a special focus on patriarchal crimes and thus ensures that these always remain a priority of the internal security forces and are not taken seriously and prosecuted, as is often the case in Europe, for example. The existence of a women-only organization also makes it significantly easier for those affected by domestic violence, for example, to seek help, as it is culturally ostracized to talk about such intimate matters with a man. The Asayîşa Jin also ensures that the laws fought for by the women's movement after the revolution, such as the ban on forced

marriage, child marriage and polygamy, are consistently enforced. Even if there are raids or arrests in the context of crimes against women, these are always carried out by the Asayîşa Jin. It is important to note that Rojava's system is designed to minimize the use of internal security forces and other quasi-governmental institutions. So before the Asayîş are deployed at all, attempts are first made to solve the problem at a social level through organizations such as the Mala Jin (women's shelters) and justice committees. However, a detailed description of Rojava's legal system and how it works would go beyond the scope of this article.

In summary, it can be said that the Asayîşa Jin ensure the defense and protection of women within society. They are a trustworthy point of contact for women and see it as their task to ensure that the achievements that the women's movement has fought for at a political level are not undermined or attacked.

The last major women's defense structure is the HPC-Jin (Hêzên Parastina Civakî-Jin / Women's Civil Defense Units). The HPC are local neighborhood and village militias. They are not professional fighters, but people from the neighborhood who have dedicated themselves to defending their hometown in addition to their professional and family lives. The HPC patrols the neighborhoods at night, for example, or guards public buildings such as hospitals. As with the Asayîşa Jin, the HPC-Jin are primarily responsible for protecting women, so they are the ones who guard the associations and houses of the women's movement. As they are directly connected to the neighborhood, indeed are a part of it, the HPC-Jin participate much more directly in people's everyday lives and can recognize and intervene in patriarchal violence much earlier.

In addition to these three "large" women's defense structures, there are countless smaller units such as the Bethnahrin Women's Protection Forces of the Assyrian community in Rojava. Of course, there are also countless civilian organizations that make important contributions to the women's revolution on a daily basis. We will discuss these in more detail in a later newsletter.

It is undeniable that women's organizations play a key role in the Rojava Revolution. No one has more to gain from the revolution than women, and no one has more to lose if they lose. The revolution as a whole would be inconceivable without them. This prominent role of women within the revolution, as well as the fear that the women of Rojava could inspire other women, for example in Turkey, are the reasons why women's organizations are always attacked with particular severity and why pioneers such as Zozan Heseke and Sorxwîn Celal are murdered. But the history of Rojava shows that even the hardest attacks of the enemy cannot break the resistance. The women's revolution will win!

Our deepest condolences go to the families and friends of all those killed in the Women's Revolution.

Our unconditional solidarity to the countless women who continue their struggle.

Bijê Berxwedana Rojava!

Jin, Jiyan, Azadî!



POLITICS

On the role of US-troops in Rojava

Few issues relating to Rojava are as controversial within the left as the cooperation between the self-administration and the US and the associated presence of its troops in the revolutionary areas. This is more than understandable, as the United States is not exactly known as the best friend of revolutions that it did not want itself and has played a leading role in the brutal suppression of numerous progressive movements. No other imperialist state is as synonymous with intervention, imperialist wars and ruthless oppression as the US. This is precisely why consistent opposition to it is a worldwide consensus within the left. So how can it be that the Revolutionary Forces of Rojava have been cooperating with them for years?

Basis of cooperation

First of all, it must be made clear on what basis this cooperation takes place. Of course, the USA is not concerned with the well-being of the Kurdish people or their liberation, as it regularly demonstrates through its actions in North and South Kurdistan (southern Turkey and northern Iraq). Here it actively supports the fight against the Kurdish freedom movement by, among other things, supplying Turkey with fighter jets, cooperating closely with it on an intelligence level or training its soldiers and special forces. The argument that the Kurdish freedom movement has gone over to the side of imperialism and turned into a US vassal already collapses here. No state invests millions and millions in fighting its own strategic partner, but the reason why the USA is cooperating with the movement in Rojava (West Kurdistan) despite decades of hostility and active fighting in other parts of Kurdistan is purely tactical. Of course, this is not for humanitarian reasons either, no, the USA wants to weaken Assad and thus Russia, take control of strategic oil fields, split up Syria and improve its own geopolitical position in the Middle East. The Rojava Revolutionary Forces were the faction within Syria with which the USA thought it was most likely to achieve these goals. The decades-long enmity with them was subordinated as a “lesser evil” to the “greater cause”, at least until the moment when cooperation loses its tactical utility for the US. The movement is aware of all this, it has no illusions about the intentions of the US and knows the purely tactical and temporary nature of this alliance. The reason why it has held on to this alliance until now is that it is also of great tactical benefit to it. Emergence of the alliance Shortly after it began, the revolution was ruthlessly attacked by the Islamist gangs of Daesh (ISIS). Daesh significantly outnumbered the revolutionary forces both by sheer numbers and the quality of their equipment.

Light tanks, state-of-the-art rifles and night vision devices on one side fought against AKs and old Soviet rocket launchers on the other. In order to hold its own militarily against this force, the movement needed allies. Its two neighbors, the Syrian and Turkish states, were out of the question for this role. The Assad regime, as the former colonial ruler of Rojava, had not the slightest interest in arming its own rebels and the Turkish state, also a colonial ruler over large parts of Kurdistan, went one step further and directly supported Daesh in its fight against the revolution. So, under the political circumstances of the time, the US was the only ally left to provide the revolutionary forces with much-needed support. Air support in particular was crucial in the fight against Daesh; without it, the military units of the self-administration would have suffered far greater losses in the urban warfare and the suffering of the peoples of northern and eastern Syria would have been immeasurably greater.

Tactical benefits of the alliance to this day

Even though Daesh has been defeated (for now) territorially, Rojava's existence is still in grave danger on a daily basis. The greatest threat here is a ground offensive by the Turkish state, an offensive that Erdogan has been announcing for years and which, if successful, would be tantamount to a humanitarian disaster, with countless civilians murdered and countless displaced. The reason why Turkey has not already begun this invasion is that it lacks the approval of its NATO partner, the USA. As soon as the USA gives the green light, the invasion is imminent. Every town and village where there is even one American soldier is a village that the Turkish army will never attack. By cooperating with the US, the revolutionary forces are buying themselves time to build up their defenses. Since the invasion of Afrin, for example, Rojava's network of tunnels has been extremely advanced and more special units have been trained. The USA is not a reliable ally, sooner or later it will betray the revolutionary forces, as it has already done in Afrin, but the tactical partnership with it will enable the revolutionary forces to build up the strength needed to repel an attack by Turkey and the gangs allied with it.

In short, it is an alliance of convenience on both sides.

They think they can exploit the other for their own advantage. The USA wants power in the region, the revolutionary leadership— at least temporary security. Both sides are aware that this alliance is temporary, unnatural and that the second they can no longer benefit from it, the alliance will not continue. That self-government surrounded by Islamist gangs and colonial powers, no one who takes a serious look at the reality of politics can blame them for entering into this alliance. The revolution offered Assad the opportunity to find a solution together, but he refused because he sees the revolution's grassroots democratic system as a threat to his hold on power.

Of course, parts of the cooperation can and must also be criticized, but to withdraw solidarity from the self-administration on this basis and accuse it of having switched to the side of imperialism is like accusing the IRA of being will-less servants of the emperor just because they accepted arms deliveries from the Germans. In a revolutionary situation, in a civil war, a weapon is primarily a weapon and not a German or American weapon.



Peoples Bridge is an institution that has the aim of defending the autonomous region of North East Syria and the areas of Kurdistan beyond. The achievements of the Rojava revolution, which has been ongoing for over a decade in putting progressive values such as democratic self-determination, climate justice, equality of peoples and women's liberation into practice, must be brought to Europe.

The revolution of July 19 has opened new doors on the path to freedom for the Kurdish, Arab and all other peoples of the region. It broke free from its colonial chains by implementing the democratic and liberal power and the will of the peoples by not supporting the reactionary forces under the conditions of the reactionary civil war. The women carried out the women's revolution on a line of gender liberation and organized women's self-defense. In view of the increasing attacks on the Rojava revolution by the fascist Turkish state, we in Europe have been tasked with a special responsibility. As migrants from the Middle East, workers, students and progressives, we see it as our duty to defend the hope of the oppressed of this world, which is reflected in the new form of society in Rojava.

Besides defending the revolution, this also means supporting social reconstruction. Organizing solidarity with the besieged Rojava/North and East Syria, carrying out activities to strengthen the infrastructure of the revolution, organizing support for problems that require technical, logistical and skilled capabilities remains one of the main tasks of this period. **Peoples Bridge** aims to strengthen solidarity with Kurdistan and organize a unity that can overcome the siege.

We will strengthen the bridge
between the peoples, we will strengthen solidarity with
Rojava/North East Syria!

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