

The Kurdish Freedom Struggle Today

**Dave Holmes
& Tony Iltis**

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Introduction

By Dave Holmes

The eruption of the brutal fundamentalist 'Islamic State' in the Middle East has placed the Kurdish people at the centre of the political stage. The Kurdish communities in Iraq and Syria have faced the full weight of the IS assault. The Kurdish people in Turkey have also been inescapably affected by the struggle over the border. It has even had an impact on the Kurdish population in Iran.

The most effective opposition to the Islamic State killers has come from the revolutionary democratic wing of the Kurdish freedom movement. That is, from the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), the defence forces of Rojava, the Kurdish-majority liberated territory in northern Syria.

The Kurdish people have long been denied their own country. But in Turkey and Syria they are fighting, not for independence, but for real autonomy and democracy. This simple but profound aspiration places them at odds with all the various regimes in the region and, ultimately, with imperialism which wants domination, not people's power.

The Rojava Revolution has attracted increasing interest and admiration around the world because of its unyielding resistance to the Islamic State and the heavy and unprecedented participation of women in the fighting forces.

There is also a growing awareness that Rojava is trying to build a new society, one in which all ethnic and religious groups can live together amicably and cooperatively, in which women are empowered, and which is based on grassroots democracy and a communal economy.

The Middle East is a tremendously rich mosaic of different ethnic and religious communities. This diversity is anathema for the IS fanatics and Islamist fundamentalists

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of all stripes. They want to destroy it and impose their brand of uniformity and control on it — they seek to tear up the actual living fabric of society. As we have seen in recent years especially, such madness can only be a recipe for inhuman suffering.

Rojava, on the other hand, wants to make this diversity one of the foundation stones of its society. This is the only way forward for humanity.

With its embrace of diversity, nonsectarianism, grassroots democracy, feminism and ecology, Rojava is a model for the whole Middle East.

In Turkey the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and the outlawed PKK are struggling, in different conditions, for the same thing. The great success of the HDP in the June 7, 2015 parliamentary elections was based on an appeal, not only to the downtrodden Kurdish population, but to all those across the country suffering oppression, discrimination and exploitation. Now the regime is mounting a fresh assault on the Kurds as it struggles to regain unfettered power.

This pamphlet concentrates on the Kurdish struggle in Rojava and Turkey. It aims to provide information and perspective on these tremendously important developments and, hopefully, furnish a basis for more active solidarity in Australia. ■



Kurdish majority population areas in 1986. Since this time there have been significant population movements in Turkey as a result of the civil war (1984-2013) with large numbers of Kurds moving into western Turkey. Istanbul is now the city with the largest Kurdish population, variously estimated at 2-4 million.

The Kurdish Freedom Struggle: Oppression & Resistance

By Dave Holmes

The Kurds are the largest ethnic group without a state of their own. They are divided between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. There is also a sizeable diaspora.

How many Kurds are there? This is a politically-charged issue and estimates vary considerably. The Wikipedia entry under ‘Kurds’ gives the following estimates: Iran 5.9-7.9 million, Iraq 4.6-6.5 million and Syria 1.3-3 million. (Its figures for Turkey are way too low.)

A September 20, 2012 article by Mashallah Dakak reported on new data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, a government agency. Using this data, the author suggested that 20 million was a reasonable estimate of the number of Kurds living in Turkey — 27% of the then total population of 74.7 million.¹

Putting all these figures together suggests the total number of Kurds in the region is between 32 and 38 million.

Then there is the diaspora, especially in Europe — in Germany alone there are an estimated 800,000 Kurds — but also in countries like Azerbaijan and Israel.

Kurds big losers in postwar settlement

In the Middle East, World War I saw British and French imperialism manoeuvring to grab as much territory from the collapsing Ottoman empire as possible. Britain seized what became Palestine, Jordan and Iraq and the French got Lebanon and Syria. The Kurds were promised their own homeland but this didn’t happen.

After the war many Turkish cities and towns were occupied by the British and French and their allies. In May 1919 a Greek army invaded Turkey. The war of independence lasted from 1919 to 1923. In October of that year a republic was proclaimed. Mustafa Kemal, the victor of Gallipoli, was its first president and dominating figure.

Despite his vaunted “secularism”, Kemal and the nationalist officers around him

wanted a Turkey made up of Sunni Muslims and saw other communities as a threat to the integrity of the state. The 1915 genocide had dealt with the Christian Armenians. The Kurds were too numerous and would have to be forcibly assimilated.

During the war of independence against the imperialists and their proxies, when Kurdish support was vital, Kemal stressed that in the new state “Turks and Kurds would live as brothers and equals”. But once victory had been assured, Kemal was quick to declare that “the state which we have just created is a Turkish state”.²

In March 1924, a government decree banned all Kurdish schools, associations and publications. For decades even speaking Kurdish was a crime. The Kurdish regions were subject to brutal repression. Several revolts were ruthlessly crushed.

Even today, despite a number of concessions, Kurds in Turkey are still denied public education in their mother tongue.

Syria: Kurds face Arabisation campaigns

The largest non-Arab minority, the Kurdish population in Syria suffered heavy discrimination under successive Arab-chauvinist regimes.

In 1962 some 120,000 Kurds in Hasaka province were stripped of Syrian citizenship and all the rights to work, property, education, etc. that go with it. Often they were forced off their land and Arab or Assyrian settlers moved in.

In 1973 in Hasaka the Syrian authorities dispossessed tens of thousands of Kurds of their land which was given to Arab settlers moved in from other areas.

These and other Arabisation campaigns substantially changed the demography of northern Syria. In Rojava today, the regions between the original three cantons have large Arab majorities. Dealing with the legacy of this ethnic cleansing and bringing some measure of justice to the victims will require the greatest political sensitivity, tolerance and democracy. Military operations in these areas require alliances with Arab and other non-Kurd forces.

Iraq: Oppression & betrayal

The history of the Kurds in Iraq is one of continuous struggle for their rights against Arab-chauvinist regimes.

One of the most ghastly episodes occurred towards the end of the Iran-Iraq war. On March 16, 1988 the Kurdish city of Halabja was subjected to a gas attack by the forces of the Saddam Hussein regime. Up to 5000 people were killed, with thousands more badly injured.

Halabja was part of the regime’s genocidal 1986-89 Al-Anfal campaign which targeted the Kurdish and other non-Arab minorities. As many as 180,000 Kurds were killed.

In August 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, leading to the first Gulf War. In early 1991 the United States urged the Iraqi people to rise up and topple the regime. Uprisings took place in both the south and in the Kurdish areas in the north. Most of Kurdistan was liberated. But Washington took no concrete action to help the insurgents and the regime was able to crush the southern rebels.

Then it moved against the Kurds. Unable to match the firepower of the regime forces, the Kurdish rebellion collapsed and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled into the mountains.

The US established a no-fly protected zone in the north and in 1992 a Kurdish-controlled region was established — the Kurdistan Regional Government. However, this area was not subject to a unified Kurdish administration but was divided into a northern zone controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani, and a southern one dominated by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani. The KDP and PUK fought a civil war between 1994 and 1996 in which several thousand people died.

Iran: Islamic Republic oppresses Kurds

Iran is a multi-ethnic country with Persians a majority but with non-Persians making up around 40%. Iranian Kurds welcomed the 1979 revolution which overthrew Shah Reza Pahlavi. They rose up and took control of their areas. But the new Islamic leadership of Iran saw this a threat and moved to crush the revolt by force. Over 10,000 Kurds were killed.

Kurds in Iran continue to experience oppression. Prisoners face torture and execution. In March 2015 six Kurds were executed despite a worldwide outcry.

In 2004 the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) was founded, inspired by the struggle of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) .

Turkey: PKK insurgency

The foundation congress of the PKK took place in November 1978 near the Turkish city of Lice. The leading figure in the group was Abdullah Öcalan.

When the military coup took place in September 1980, Öcalan and most of the group's forces withdrew to Syria

In 1984 the PKK launched an armed insurgency. With ceasefires in 1993 and again in 1999-2004, the uprising continued until March 2013 when the PKK declared its last ceasefire.

The human cost of the war was enormous. A commonly cited figure is that over 40,000 people died but according to estimates cited in Wikipedia, the real figure is

likely to be considerably higher than that. In addition, 4000 villages were destroyed and several million people displaced.³

The economic cost was similarly gigantic. Hundreds of billions of dollars were consumed and the economy severely damaged. One recent government report put the cost from 1986 to 2012 at \$1.2 trillion!⁴ If these huge resources had been used in rational development projects, Turkey would be a different place today.

The PKK has established bases and a zone of control in the mountainous region of northern Iraq, bordering both Turkey and Iran.

The PKK and its supporters are active in all the areas of Kurdistan.

Öcalan: Imprisonment and rethinking

One turning point in the long civil war came in 1998 when PKK leader Öcalan was forced to leave Syria. No European country wanted to give him refuge and eventually he was forced to go to Kenya where US agents arrested him and turned him over to Turkish authorities.

In Turkey he was put on trial and sentenced to death. But in August 2002, with the abolition of the death penalty, Öcalan's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He is confined to a high security jail on Imrali Island, 65km off Istanbul in the Sea of Marmara. Access to him is tightly controlled.

From prison Öcalan made a harsh criticism of the past practices of the PKK. He said the movement had been strongly disrupted by banditry, warlordism and gangsterism and that a great many fighters had died unnecessarily.⁵

Öcalan called for a completely new strategy. A peace process was to be initiated with the Turkish government and the PKK would transform into an open legal movement. The fight for an independent state was to be abandoned; this was unrealistic both militarily and politically. Armed self-defence was legitimate but must be kept within strict and defined limits.

But the overriding objective had to be genuine autonomy and democratisation of the country. (See his historic March 2013 Newroz message which was read out to a huge rally in Diyarbakir; it is reprinted in this pamphlet.)

Aliza Marcus, in her 2007 book *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, regards Öcalan's change of views as irrelevant or special pleading to curry favour with his captors. But this dismissal completely ignores the political rationality and cohesiveness of the project Öcalan is advocating.

One can be critical or not of the political line and practice of the PKK in the past (and Öcalan is extremely critical). But there is no denying the immense progressive impact of Öcalan's current ideas embodied in the Kurdish struggle today in Turkey

and in the Rojava Revolution.

The emphasis on grassroots democracy, ecology, creating a society where all ethnic and religious communities can find their place, and the tremendous and unprecedented weight given to the empowerment of women (even defining the revolution as a women's revolution and the PKK as a women's party) — all this is genuinely distinctive and points the way forward for the whole Middle East.

Kurdistan Regional Government

The PKK and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the dominant party in Rojava, represent the revolutionary wing of the Kurdish movement. Massoud Barzani and the KDP leadership, on the other hand, are a conservative, corrupt wing of the movement. Indeed, the Barzani leadership is tribal with family members occupying key positions of power. The PUK leadership is much the same.⁶

The revolutionary and conservative wings are engaged in a struggle for political influence. However, at key moments of the war against the Islamic State, the intervention of PKK and YPG/YPJ forces in Iraq has been vital and the KRG leadership has been forced to acknowledge them.

The KRG peshmerga is not a true national army but is largely divided into units controlled by either the KDP or the PUK.

The KDP is hostile to the PYD. The KDP has tried to establish an armed presence in Rojava but has been blocked by the YPG/YPJ.

Turkey has close relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government. Some 1300 Turkish firms are active in the area; each year Turkey exports billions of dollars of goods to Kurdistan and takes most of its oil.

A great deal of investment money has poured into Kurdistan in the last period, much of it going into building fancy shopping malls. Corruption is widespread and the gap between rich and poor is growing.

In April 2014 the KRG dug a 26km-long trench, two metres deep and three metres wide along its border with Rojava. The PYD and the PKK denounced it as project to isolate the Kurdish areas of Syria. ■

NOTES

1 See <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/9/turkey4166.htm>. **2** Kendal, 'Kurdistan in Turkey' in Chaliand ed., *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (Zed Books: London, 1993), p. 48. **3** See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey-PKK_conflict. **4** See <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/turkey-kurds-pkk-peace-process-bill-for-ending.html#>. **5** See Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century* (Transmedia Publishing: London, 2011), especially pp. 50-69. **6** See <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2010/6/state4002.htm>.

The Rojava Revolution

By Tony Illtis

Rojava, the Kurdish-majority liberated zone in northern Syria, is the location of a unique experiment in grassroots, participatory democracy that emphasises social and economic equality, ecology, religious tolerance, ethnic inclusion, collectivity combined with individual freedom and, most obviously, feminism.

This is behind both Rojava's surprising success against the Islamic State and the distinctive character of its military forces — the most important of which are the Peoples Protection Units (YPG), which has male and female fighters, and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ).

The Rojava Revolution — for that is what it is — is distinctively Kurdish and 21st century.

Abandoning the nation-state

The ideological changes that the PKK underwent following the kidnapping, rendition and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 was in part a recognition that the previous strategy had reached an impasse. But it was also an adaptation to the realities of Kurdistan.

The name Rojava is itself a reflection of the borders that divide Kurdistan. It simply means “West” (as in West Kurdistan). Öcalan recognised that the struggles in each of the four parts of Kurdistan, while interlinked, had distinct paths. Furthermore, in no part of Kurdistan are there not large numbers of people belonging to non-Kurdish minorities.

The development after 1991 under US protection of the capitalist Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq (what became the Kurdistan Regional Government) provided further negative lessons.

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Öcalan and the Kurdish left concluded that the nation-state itself was an oppressive institution. Borrowing the municipal libertarianism of US post-anarchist Murray Bookchin, a new approach to revolution was adopted based on local democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism between autonomous communities. The aim was no longer to create a Kurdish nation-state but to radically democratise both Kurdistan and the nation-states it was part of.

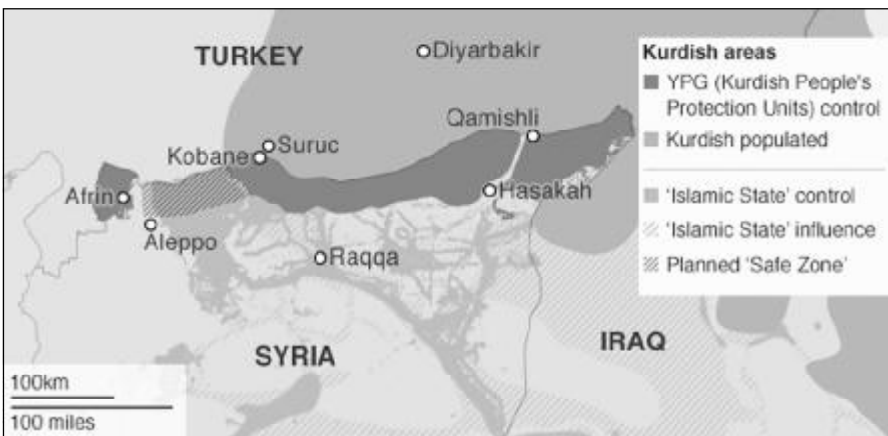
One aspect of this change was that the PKK was divided into four separate parties in the four parts of Kurdistan, ideologically linked but organisationally separate. In Rojava the Democratic Union Party (PYD) was formed in 2003.

The Rojava Revolution & the Syrian civil war

One of the many slanders directed against the PYD, YPG and YPJ by partisans of the Sunni Arab Syrian opposition is that they did not join the fight against the Assad regime that began after the 2011 uprising against the dictatorship. In reality, the YPG and YPJ have been fighting the regime since their establishment after the 2004 Qamishlo uprising.

However, their military philosophy of armed self-defence, linked to the political philosophy of “democratic confederalism”, means not fighting offensive actions but defending areas under democratic autonomous self-rule.

In 2011, the PYD supported the mass, democratic (but ideologically incoherent) uprising against Assad. However, they were concerned about the opposition overly militarising the conflict, which was initially the result of Assad’s military response to



Rojava cantons, July 2015. With the capture of Tel Abyad in June, the Cizîre and Kobanê cantons are now linked up.

unarmed protests but fuelled by the intelligence agencies of the West and its regional allies.

This, and the increasing ethnic and religious chauvinism of an opposition becoming defined as Sunni and Arab (also fuelled by the intelligence agencies of the West and its regional allies), caused the Kurdish movement to stay aloof from the fractious armed opposition.

By July 2012, the Assad regime's military presence in Rojava was depleted by their need to defend Aleppo and Damascus from the Sunni Arab opposition but there was a growing danger that Rojava would become a battleground between opposing forces that were both hostile to Kurds and the other ethnic minorities in the region, such as the Christian Assyrians. This was the context of the uprisings that established three autonomous cantons in Rojava and allowed the ideas of "democratic confederalism" to be most visibly realised in practice.

Democratic autonomy

The PYD has played an ideological role in the transformation that has taken place in the autonomous cantons, but not an institutional one. It was instrumental in setting up the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), which organises and mobilises the population but like the PYD, has no institutional role. TEV-DEM is organisationally independent of the PYD.

Institutional power is based on a system called "Democratic Autonomy". TEV-DEM representative Çinar Salih explained how it works to a visiting academic delegation in Qamislo in December 2014.¹

Our system rests on the communes, made up of neighbourhoods of 300 people. The communes have co-presidents, and there are co-presidents at all levels, from commune to canton administration. In each commune there are five or six different committees. Communes work in two ways. First, they resolve problems quickly and early — for example, a technical problem or a social one. Some jobs can be done in five minutes, but if you send it to the state, it gets caught in a bureaucracy. So we can solve issues quickly. The second way is political. If we speak about true democracy, decisions can't be made from the top and go to the bottom, they have to be made at the bottom and then go up in degrees.

The co-presidents are one male and one female.

Qamislo has 6 different districts. Each district has 18 communes, and each commune is made up of 300 people ... The 2 elected co-presidents from each commune come together to make up the people's council of that district. Then each of these 6 district people's councils elects 2 co-presidents. So from Qamislo's 6 districts, 12 people make

up the citywide people's council of Qamislo. But 12 people alone can't make up the council — it's supposed to have 200. So in addition to these 12 people, the others are directly elected. Even if you're not on a committee or weren't elected in the commune, you can put their name out and potentially be elected.

Cizîre canton consists of 12 cities. Delegates to the canton-level people's council are allocated according to population. Qamislo is the biggest city, so it gets more delegates than others — it gets 20. They determine it by population numbers. The co-presidents are already part of this big council; then Qamislo gets 18 more. Each city people's council elects who's going to go to the cantonwide people's council. At the end you have a canton-wide people's council. It's like a parliament, but the ties between the commune and the councils are not severed.

Female representation is guaranteed on all the peoples councils. No gender is allowed more than 60% representation. In addition there are parallel women-only structures.

Women's councils exist in parallel at all levels, the commune, the district, the city, and the canton. The women's councils don't decide on general issues — that's what the people's councils are for. They discuss issues that are specifically about women ... A committee tries to resolve issues between people. The women's council also has a committee like this. So if they see in this committee an issue that concerns women, like a domestic violence dispute, and they disagree with the people's council, and they say no, the no of the women's council will be accepted. They have veto power on issues concerning women.

Feminism

The emphasis on women's liberation and politicisation that runs throughout the movement is reflected in the high visibility of female fighters. Part of the ideological rethinking that the PKK and its derivatives went through was the realisation of the centrality of male supremacy not only to capitalism but to all class society since it first evolved more than three millennia ago, and that not adequately addressing this was one of the shortcomings of the 20th century left.

The PKK always supported women's liberation and female fighters were always in the ranks of its armed affiliates, but the ideological shift to "democratic confederalism" moved women's liberation to the centre of the Kurdish struggle. "Democratic confederalism ... is flexible, multicultural, against monopolies and oriented towards consensus. Ecology and feminism are its central pillars," Öcalan wrote.²

Çinar Salih said: "Our Rojava revolution is a revolution of women. In Rojava there is no area of life in which women don't take an active part ... We believe that a revolution that does not open the way for women's liberation is not a revolution.

There have been revolutions in Libya and Egypt and Tunisia ... but the same status for women has persisted.”¹

Economy

Because of blockade and war, exacerbated by an influx of refugees from other parts of Syria, the economy of the cantons is still largely geared toward survival. However, the emphasis on providing universal housing, nutrition, healthcare, childcare and education, none of which were provided by the Assad regime during peacetime, reflects the socialist orientation of the revolution.

The longer term goals were explained by Dara Kurdaxi, from the committee for economic revival and development in Afrîn, in a November 2013 interview.³

Naturally we're only at the beginning. But nonetheless, even if only in small ways, we're seeing some positive developments. We must be clear that we don't need an economic revival and development which has no clear goal for the community ... It shouldn't be a capitalist system, one without respect for the environment; nor should it be a system which continues class contradictions and in the end only serves capital.

Rojava: A Syrian revolution

The revolution in Rojava is a Syrian revolution as well as a Kurdish revolution. In its preamble, the constitution of the Rojava autonomous cantons, the “Charter of the Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira, and Kobanê”,⁴ describes the cantons as “a confederation of Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens”. The preamble says:

In building a society free from authoritarianism, militarism, centralism and the intervention of religious authority in public affairs, the Charter recognises Syria's territorial integrity and aspires to maintain domestic and international peace.

In establishing this Charter, we declare a political system and civil administration founded upon a social contract that reconciles the rich mosaic of Syria through a transitional phase from dictatorship, civil war and destruction, to a new democratic society where civic life and social justice are preserved.

The emphasis on the structures of the democratic autonomous administration being multi-ethnic, as opposed to Kurdish, is not mere rhetoric. Everything from street signs, to media, to education is in all of the languages of any particular community.

As with gender, on the communal and other councils, ethnic participation is enabled both by quotas ensuring that all communities are represented in the general structures and by parallel structures for ethnic minorities.

The revolution quickly won support from non-Kurdish minorities, reflected both

in non-Kurdish participation in the revolution's structures and organisations and alliances made with non-Kurdish political and armed groups.

The greatest difficulties for the revolution have been with the Arab community. The Arab-majority areas of Rojava were created by the ethnic cleansing and transmigration policies of the Assad dynasty and its predecessors over the past 50 years, and the revolution's enemies have exploited fears that the Rojava Kurds will reverse this demographic change by expelling Arabs. This has not been helped by the example of the KRG in northern Iraq, which did just that.

The revolutionary forces of Rojava, however, have demonstrated that not only do they have no intention of doing this but that the principals of democratic autonomy apply as much to Arab communities as to any other communities.

IS, Turkey & the US

Contrary the conventional wisdom of the Western media, the Turkish state is not threatened by the possibility of sharing a border with an independent Kurdish state. Its close relationship with the KRG proves this. The possibility of a sharing a border Kurdish-led, multi-ethnic, religiously tolerant, socialist, feminist revolution — one with close ties with the Kurdish freedom movement and broader left inside its borders — is another question.

Initially Turkey encouraged the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front, and other Jihadi opposition groups to attack Rojava. However, the YPJ and YPG saw off these attacks with little more difficulty than they had those of the regime.

Turkey transferred its support to IS. This became highly visible during the siege of Kobanê, which lies on the border. Also apparent but less visible was the fact that despite having just initiated its "War on IS" — an air war in search of a ground force as partner in Syria — the US was less than eager to align with the YPG and YPJ.

During the siege, and since, the YPG and YPJ has consistently had two requests of the West. One was to cease Turkish support for IS, the other was heavy artillery weapons and night vision equipment, so they could match IS in firepower. During the siege they also asked for access across the border so the YPG and YPJ forces could reinforce Kobanê. Neither request was met.

However, the US did begin coordinating its air strikes with the YPG and YPJ. Rather than allow reinforcements from the YPG and YPJ access to Kobanê, the West sent a detachment of KRG fighters and a detachment from the Free Syrian Army (FSA). While the role of the KRG troops was minimal, they did have heavy artillery, which was useful to the defenders. Also useful was the coordination of air strikes.

The FSA is not a cohesive force but an umbrella name used by large number of

independent units, often at loggerheads with each other. The FSA troops sent at the West's behest played no role in the fighting. However, other FSA units, who had gone to Kobanê at their own behest after being squeezed between IS and Assad regime forces, became the core of the Burkan al-Firat ("Euphrates Volcano") alliance, which encompasses the most significant Arab allies of the YPJ and YPG.

To Erdogan's alarm, the YPG, YPJ and their allies not only lifted the siege of Kobanê, but made significant advances. The turning point was the June 2015 liberation of Tel Abyad by YPJ, YPG and Burkan al-Firat forces, linking up two of three Rojava cantons and cutting one of the key IS supply lines across the border. Coming a week after the HDP's electoral successes in Turkey, Erdogan decided to take drastic action.

While the US-led coalition has to date continued to coordinate air strikes with the YPJ, YPG and Burkan al-Firat forces, it reacted to Erdogan's launching of a war against PKK forces in Turkey and Iraq, and YPG and YPJ forces in Syria, by welcoming Turkey into the "War on IS".

The West remains hampered by its own anti-Islamist propaganda but despite some ongoing issues in US-Turkish negotiations, the two NATO powers are looking dangerously close to finalising an arrangement that will allow the establishment of a "safe zone" occupied by Turkish troops or proxies and backed by US air power.

Rojava needs the world's solidarity — and deserves it because the world needs Rojava. ■

NOTES

1 Reported by Janet Biehl, on her website Ecology or Catastrophe <http://www.biehlonbookchin.com/rojavas-communes-and-councils/>. **2** A. Öcalan, *Demokratischer Konföderalismus*, 2012, p. 21. Quote translated from German original by Richard Braude, <http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com>. **3** Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê, November 28, 2013 <http://anfturkce.net/guncel/ekonomist-kurdaxi-suriye-karanliga-rojava-aydinliga-qidiyor>. **4** <http://civiroglu.net/the-constitution-of-the-rojava-cantons/>

YPJ Commanders: 'The revolution in Rojava has shown the strength of women'



Commander Nesrin Abdullah: The other half of Rojava

“We are not soldiers, we are militants; we are not paid to make war, we are partisans of revolution. We live with our people, follow a philosophy and have a political project. At the same time we are carrying out a gender struggle against the patriarchal system. Other combatants are our comrades; we have political and friendly relations”, this is how Nesrin Abdullah, commander of the YPJ, explains to me the role of women

combatants in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) and their relationship with the male People's Defence Units (YPG).

She is 36 years old, though in appearance looks younger, was born in Dirik in the canton of Cizîre, and is self-confident. Before being involved in the army she was a journalist. She is unmarried, as is demanded of all Kurdish fighters, men and women. From the time civil war erupted in Syria (2011) — and ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and the

These interviews with two commanders of the Women's Defence Units (YPJ) explaining the role and goals of the YPJ were given to journalists of the Italian left-wing daily *Il Manifesto* on June 24 and 26, 2015. Nesrin Abdullah was interviewed while on a visit to Italy where she met parliamentarians and also ordinary Italians during various events throughout the country. Commander Rangin was interviewed by telephone in Kobanê while combat with IS was taking place. The text is taken from <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1137.php>.

Levant) attacked Rojava destroying Kobanê — Nesrin Abdullah was on the front line, and has become one of the “heroines” celebrated not only in Kurdistan but worldwide.

“At this moment in Kurdistan the role of women is historic, not only for Kurdish women and those in the Middle East but also at the international level. Our struggle aims at the creation of a new society starting with an ecological vision, the respect for nature, and the affirmation of the rights and identity of women. The world today is unstable; there are many threats, among these is terrorism. As women combatants we have a lot of responsibility toward all women.”

Giuliana Sgrena: Women who in the past took part in struggles for the liberation of their countries placed the rights of women in second place, thinking they would be achieved afterwards thanks to their contribution, but it did not turn out so. For you it is not like this ...

Nesrin Abdullah: The world shifted from a matriarchal to a patriarchal system and women lost their identity. Patriarchy has oppressed women, they have also suffered physical violence, and despite struggling they have not succeeded in achieving a space within society. Nevertheless women have always striven for their liberty and their rights. Through our struggle we are realising this dream. It is the struggles of previous years that have led to the creation of the YPJ; it was the example of the movement of the women of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), who for years fought in the mountains for their identity and freedom. Women have been protagonists of the Arab Spring yet this has not opened a path for the realisation of their rights; instead the revolution in Rojava has shown the strength of women. Ours is a struggle in which everyone participates: from 7-year-old girls to 70-year-old women, this has allowed for a feminine presence in all areas, even in the military.

Sgrena: Do you think that women combatants who confront the fanatic terrorists have caused a shock inside ISIS?

Abdullah: I think the presence of women among combatants has caused a breakdown in the convictions and maybe in the faith of ISIS. They have always fought against armies of men and they also won, but now confronting women must have been a shock because they declared women to be the main enemy. Moreover, they immediately decreed that if a fighter is killed by a woman he cannot enter heaven and his body is burned. When they killed a women fighter they cut off her head and displayed it by the hair like a trophy. This act is the symbol of an ideological defeat for ISIS. For us, in contrast, fighting this enemy has become a symbol of identity and has mesmerised and won the attention of Arab, Assyrian, Turkish and German women (among whom there has also been a martyr).

Sgrena: Are there also Italian women?

Abdullah: Italians that I know of no, but there could be.

Sgrena: What is your relationship with the western coalition, in the past these interventions always failed. Do you think that together you will succeed in defeating ISIS?

Abdullah: We are fighting for democracy; our door is also open to the coalition if it wants to help us. Up to now they have helped us with bombardments, including heavy ones. We are hoping the assistance will not remain only at the level of bombing.

Sgrena: Do you think a coalition led by the USA is interested in assisting your democratic project?

Abdullah: So far the assistance has only been through bombing, which we well know has not been undertaken for us but to defeat ISIS as a mutual enemy. But it must go further: Rojava needs international recognition, we will see if the coalition is willing to also give us diplomatic help. We demand an end to all massacres including to that of our identity.

Sgrena: The first assistance could be to pressure Turkey to put an end to the embargo that prevents the passage of aid for Kurds.

Abdullah: We think that if the coalition wants to, it could create humanitarian corridors. The borders need to be opened for humanitarian purposes, but we also need commercial relations.

Sgrena: Can the success of the HDP (People's Democratic Party, a party of Kurdish inspiration) in the recent Turkish elections foster a change in the policies of Ankara?

Abdullah: Certainly when a Kurdish party is strong it is an advantage for all Kurds. They are our representatives in Turkey, their victory is our victory. Important also is the fact they elected many women (31 out of 79), this is a terrific message to the Turkish parliament. The success of the HDP could encourage a common policy among the Kurds. We hope in addition that it helps to push Turkey toward a more democratic regime to also foster new relations with Syria. We want autonomy for the three Kurdish cantons, but our country is Syria.

Sgrena: And what will happen in Syria?

Abdullah: Syria has gone the way of a suicide bomber; there is now nothing on which to build. We are ready at the military level to construct a new democratic system but political engagement is necessary. The Syrian opposition does not have a project for the future of Syria and proposals cannot come from abroad; it could follow our example. We are not waiting for the situation in Syria to resolve itself in order to achieve our project for democratic autonomy as part of a democratic Syria. The model proposed from Rojava is popular at the international level because it guarantees everyone can live freely with their culture, identity and religion. We're fighting solely

against ISIS and are ready to defend the system we created; we are one pillar of our system.

Sgrena: Yet the charter of Rojava foresees a demilitarised territory.

Abdullah: We only want to maintain a self-defence force, to administer our territory. In the Middle East all peoples need self-defence.

Sgrena: Do you plan on remaining in the YPJ in the future?

Abdullah: Right now our people need to be defended, this role must be continued at this time. So for now I'm not thinking about anything else; if one day it is no longer required, I will work where necessary. In the past I was a journalist.

Sgrena: What do you ask of Italy?

Abdullah: Above all, political support for the international recognition of Rojava and then assistance for the reconstruction of Kobanê, but also wider cooperation. In addition, the weapons we fight ISIS with are obsolete, so we also need arms, but only for defence.

Commander Rangin: 'International coalition against ISIS only in words'

"This is the moment that ends the isolation", declared the commander of the YPJ, Nesrin Abdullah in a news conference at the Italian Parliament in Rome shortly after the new attack by ISIS on Kobanê.

To discuss the new crisis that is gripping the city, we reached Commander Rangin (June 26) by telephone at her headquarters in Kobanê.

Giuseppe Acconcia: What is happening in Kobanê?

Commander Rangin: The fighting continues. There are about a hundred Daesh [Arabic acronym for ISIS] fighters holed up in the city carrying out summary attacks against the population.

Acconcia: How do you rate the performance of the international coalition?

Rangin: They are not doing their best. Kurdish civilians are often killed in the bombardments. They happen by mistake, according to them, but we believe they want to maintain a kind of equilibrium between the jihadis and the Kurdish combatants. If the coalition wants to bomb a cigarette they do it. Sometimes we ask for targeted attacks and they say it's not possible to proceed. Many jihadi fighters have weapons from the United States or Turkey. Yet for months we haven't received enough weapons. After the liberation of the areas controlled by the Syrian regime we reinforced the armed struggle but we are always more dependent on the support of the people than on arms.

Acconcia: You joined the YPJ in April 2013 and immediately entered into the

professional units. How is the YPJ organised?

Rangin: First of all there are the local self-defence units (Haremi), then professional fighters and finally the resistance units. Men leave the self-defence units to join the YPG; the more educated women often enter directly into the professional combatants. We are like every other army; we depend on the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan. But we are not only an army. In meetings we spend time discussing and self-criticising. We are a defensive army. In order to fight, women must know why and for what to fight. For this we begin with ideological and academic preparation, because every YPJ fighter must know her own self.

Acconcia: So the YPJ is an army of feminists?

Rangin: We stand for a radical feminism. We depend on ourselves and benefit from the experience of everyone. Women at home protect the essentialness of women. Our fight is as women (no matter if Kurdish, Syrian or European) and for a nationality that identifies with democratic autonomy and is opposed to the concept of the state. During the fighting for Shengal [Arabic name: Sinjar], women went to save other women. At Til Temir, YPJ fighters went to save Arab women. We went to save dozens of women captives in villages occupied by ISIS.

Acconcia: One of the themes you deal with in YPJ training is "love and death".

Rangin: Love is essential, it's part of everyone's instinct. The philosophy of death is a way of living. In past times everyone knew death could come quickly; now it is different and this disconnects us from nature and does not allow us to accept the idea of death. Religion exploits death: if you're a martyr you go to heaven. For us love and death are in contradiction: when we discuss it, it's to search for a new military, communitarian and quotidian [everyday] life. Women are not made to only have children. We want to reform and renew the community. We also talk a lot about sensuality.

Acconcia: How is the YPJ received by male comrades?

Rangin: Some men don't accept that their commander may be a woman. In this context the women are soldiers, it's not in vain. We have to fight against the concept that many male comrades have of women. When we talk about it with a YPG member, it often happens that he changes his mind and understands that the men's units exist because the YPJ exists and not vice versa. We are not a military adornment. Many of our female fighters have been blown skywards by mines; they are commanders (the majority of them) of male units. There is plenty of autonomy regarding this. We have mixed battalions; in almost all battalions there are co-commanders. For instance, if Kurdish fighters do not commit ethnic cleansing after the capture of a city, it is mainly because our influence stops errors from being committed. ■

Turkey: War on the Kurds or a Serious Peace Process?

By Dave Holmes

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is an Islamic-based neoliberal party. It first won office in 2002 and ruled Turkey alone for 13 years. In August 2014, Erdogan became the first popularly elected president; Ahmet Davutoglu, formerly foreign minister, took over as prime minister. The AKP lost its majority in the June 7, 2015 parliamentary elections.

Peace process

In the first period of AKP rule, the government enacted some important reforms affecting the Kurdish community. Limited TV broadcasting in Kurdish was permitted as were Kurdish language courses in private schools. The state of emergency in the southeast was lifted. Later a 24-hour state-owned Kurdish-language TV channel was established.

However, although such measures were generally positive they didn't address key Kurdish demands such as public school education of students in their mother tongue, disbanding of the pro-government village guard militia, constitutional recognition and some form of self-government.

At the end of 2012 Erdogan revealed that the government was holding discussions with Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Nationalist and far-right circles were not happy. On January 9, 2013 PKK leader Sakine Cansiz and two colleagues were murdered in Paris. The killer had links to the MIT, the Turkish security service. Just what elements in the MIT organised the killings is not clear but the government condemned the assassinations and the talks continued.

Öcalan's historic March 2013 Newroz message (reprinted in this pamphlet) called for an end to the armed struggle. "This is not abandoning the struggle — we are initiating a different struggle," he said.

On this basis the PKK agreed to support the peace process. In May 2013 it began withdrawing its forces from Turkey to camps in northern Iraq.

On February 28, 2015 a joint press conference of the government and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) at Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Palace announced a 10-point peace plan. However, the next month Erdogan denied there was any agreement.

In a very revealing July 28, 2015 interview,¹ HDP leader Selahattin Demirtas explained that the peace negotiations had been extensive, involving the government, Öcalan, the HDP and the PKK in Kandil. But the government reneged on promises to pass legislation to enable PKK fighters to withdraw from Turkey in safety. And as the fighters vacated their defence zones, the government began building military forts and roads there— clearly a preparation, not for a peaceful future, but for a violent one.

Demirtas explained that Erdogan killed the process because polls showed the AKP was losing electoral support and the HDP was gaining it. Erdogan evidently concluded he needed to veer hard right, towards conflict and the nationalist voters.

Corruption & arrogance

In recent years the Erdogan regime has become ever more synonymous with crackdowns on dissent, arrogance, corruption and hostility to Kurdish claims. The media and the legal system are under constant attack.

In May-June of 2013 Turkey was shaken by large-scale protests over the plans to demolish Taksim Gezi Park, one of central Istanbul's few remaining green spaces, and replace it with a shopping mall. Several million people were involved in actions across Turkey. The government cracked down hard; 11 people were killed and thousands



Top left: Banner of Abdullah Öcalan at Newroz rally in Kandil, northern Iraq; *top right:* Turkish President Recip Tayyip Erdogan.

arrested. Erdogan dismissed the protesters as “looters”.

On May 13, 2014, a disaster at the Soma mine in Manisa killed over 300 miners. When Erdogan visited Soma and said callously that mine deaths were “normal”, crowds chased him shouting “murderer” and “thief”.

In December 2013 a corruption scandal erupted as police investigations became public. It involved cabinet ministers, family members, senior state officials and businessmen. Tapes of phone conversations made at this time were later leaked revealing then-prime minister Erdogan instructing his son Bilal to “zero” (i.e., dispose of) huge sums of money stashed in various relatives’ houses — at least tens of millions of dollars! — for fear of raids by prosecutors.

Erdogan’s response was to label the whole thing a conspiracy by his former allies in the Islamic Hizmet movement of US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen to topple the government. He launched a crackdown on supposed Gülen supporters, targeting thousands of police, prosecutors and judges across the country. In January 2015 the AKP-dominated parliament voted *not* to lift the immunity of four ex-ministers implicated in the scandal.

Kobanê

From September 2014 to January 2015 the Rojava canton of Kobanê was besieged by a large IS forces. The city came very close to falling. But the epic resistance and the tremendous worldwide publicity generated by the heavy frontline participation of women in the heroic defence forced the US to step up its air support. Turkey was forced to let limited peshmerga forces with heavy weapons cross the country and enter the city. So Kobanê survived — a tremendous popular victory.

It has long been clear that Turkish support is vital to the IS operations in Syria. Turkey is the main transit country for foreign IS recruits, wounded IS fighters receive medical care in Turkey, IS freely purchases utilities and trucks in Turkey, IS receives covert supplies of arms and ammunition from Turkey, and oil produced in IS-held areas is easily smuggled into Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey enforces a more and more complete blockade of Rojava, preventing people and supplies from entering.

On October 4, 2014 PYD co-chairperson Saleh Muslim held talks with Turkish military intelligence officials in Ankara to plead for aid for Kobanê. He was told this would only be given if the Kurdish forces joined the Free Syrian Army and focused on toppling the Assad dictatorship, distanced themselves from the PKK, abandoned their claim to self-government, and agreed to a Turkish buffer zone inside Syria!

On this same day, Erdogan said that the PKK and the PYD are the same as IS.

With Kobanê’s fate in the balance, Erdogan gloated. On October 7 he announced

that the city was on the verge of falling.

In mid-October Kurdish protesters supporting Kobanê poured onto the streets in the Southeast and in Ankara and Istanbul. They were met with teargas, clubs, bullets and military-enforced curfews. Police and Islamists attacked them. Over 30 people were killed.

The drama of Kobanê was a watershed in the decline of Kurdish support for Erdogan and the AKP.

Rise of HDP

Over the years there have been many attempts in Turkey to establish a legal Kurdish-based party. Most of these were shut down by the authorities.

In October 2012, the HDP was founded and has since achieved electoral success unprecedented for a Kurdish organisation.

In June 2014 the HDP elected two new co-chairpersons, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yüksekdağ. A Kurd, Demirtas is a former human rights lawyer. Yüksekdağ is Turkish; she co-founded the Socialist Party of the Oppressed which later merged with the HDP.

The charismatic Demirtas stood as the HDP's candidate in the August 2014 presidential elections, achieving 9.8% — almost four million votes — a big increase on the HDP's result in the earlier municipal elections. Demirtas attracted attention with his strong advocacy for women's and LGBT rights. (See his radical "Call for a New Life" manifesto in this pamphlet.)

June 7 election results

The June 7 parliamentary elections were dominated by two things.

Firstly, Erdogan wanted a two-thirds majority in the 550-seat assembly so that the AKP could unilaterally amend the constitution to provide for a very strong executive presidency.

Secondly, the HDP took the bold decision to run as a party, betting that it could cross the very undemocratic 10% threshold and deny Erdogan his presidential majority. While the HDP's core support lies in the Kurdish community, it reached out to all those suffering oppression, discrimination and exploitation across the country. Almost half of its 550 candidates were women.

As the elections approached there was a steady drumbeat of attacks on the HDP. Scores of their offices suffered arson and bomb attacks. On June 5 an HDP rally in Diyarbakir was bombed killing four people.

Erdogan's problem

In the event, the HDP smashed the 10% barrier, achieving 13.1% (6.1 million votes) —

an increase of 7.5% over its 2011 result — and 80 deputies in the 550-seat Grand National Assembly. The AKP dropped almost 9% (4 million votes) and lost its majority. The big reason was the collapse of its vote in the Kurdish regions due to Kobanê and its failure to pursue the peace process.

Now Erdogan has a major problem. Only a coalition government is possible, or a minority government dependent on external support.

But anything less than total AKP control of parliament means he is vulnerable to the corruption investigation being restarted. Any honest inquiry will quite likely engulf key associates, his family and himself. If that happens Erdogan faces prison; being marooned in the presidency without the powers he wants will be the least of his problems.

War on the Kurds

Erdogan's solution is to create a security crisis by screaming about the terrorist threat from the PKK and the gains of the Kurds across the border in Rojava.

The July 20 Suruç bombing, which killed over 30 young socialists as they prepared to cross over to Kobanê to help rebuild the city, was almost certainly a provocation organised by regime elements.

The regime is bombing PKK bases in northern Iraq. Kurdish towns and districts are being attacked by the security forces. At the same time Öcalan is being held in total isolation so that he cannot use his great authority to urge restraint. Erdogan needs blood to be shed and nothing must be allowed to prevent this.

Erdogan hopes that some conservative Kurds will return to the AKP fold and that he can win back some nationalist Turks as well, enough to give the AKP a majority in fresh elections. The government is also going after the HDP leaders and possibly will target the whole party.

Putting aside the immorality of Erdogan's plans and the enormous suffering they are generating, the problem is that this is all a very big gamble. Fresh elections might well once more fail to give the AKP the majority it so desperately wants.

Polls show that a majority of people want a coalition government established and don't want fresh elections; they don't want an "enhanced" presidency; they want the government to pursue the peace process; and they don't want deeper involvement in the war in Syria. Moreover, Turkish business is desperate for political stability: it wants a coalition government and it wants some sort of settlement with the Kurds.

But no matter. Erdogan and the AKP have to keep pushing forward with their plan. Unless they can be stopped, Turkey clearly faces dark and menacing days. ■

NOTES

1 See <http://links.org.au/node/4532>.

Abdullah Öcalan: 'I salute the freedom Newroz of the oppressed'

I salute the people of the Middle East and Central Asia celebrating this awakening, revival and resurgence day of Newroz with extraordinary participation and unity ...

I salute all the peoples celebrating Newroz, which is the daylight and turning point of a new era, with great enthusiasm and democratic tolerance ...

I salute all the travellers on this grand path toward democratic rights, freedom and equality ...

I salute you, the Kurdish people, living at the Zagros and Taurus mountain skirts and in the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. I salute the Kurdish people, an ancient people, dwellers in the sacred lands of Mesopotamia and Anatolia, mother to all agricultural, village and urban civilisations ...

Kurds have taken part in this several-thousand-year-old civilisation in friendship and accord with diverse races, religions, creeds – we have all built it together. For Kurds the Euphrates and Tigris are the siblings of Sakarya and Maritsa. Ararat and Judi are the friends of Kaçkars and Erciyes. Halay¹ and Delilo² are in the family of Horon³ and Zeybek⁴.

These grand civilisations, these coexisting communities have more recently been pitted against each other by political pressure, external interventions and group interests. The result has been the construction of systems that are not based upon rights, law, equality and freedom.

For the last 200 years military conquests, western imperialist interventions, as well

The text of a message sent by Öcalan from his prison cell on Imrali, March 21, 2013. It was read out to the Newroz (Kurdish New Year) rally at Diyarbakir. See <http://www.freeocalan.org/?p=531>.

as repression and policies of denial have tried to submerge the Arab, Turkic, Persian and Kurdish communities to the rule of nation states, its imaginary borders and artificial problems.

The era of exploitative regimes, repression and denial is over. The peoples of the Middle East and those of Central Asia are awakening. They are returning to their roots. They demand a halt to the blinding and seditious wars and conflicts against one another.

Those thousands, millions of people who are pouring into these arenas are burning with the passion of Newroz. They cry for peace and amity, and they are demanding a solution.

This struggle, which began as my own individual rebellion against the despair, ignorance and slavery into which I was born, has sought to create a new consciousness, a new understanding and a new spirit. Today I see that our efforts have reached a new level.

Our fight has not been and can never be against any specific race, religion, sect, or group. Our fight has been against repression, ignorance and injustice, against enforced underdevelopment as well as against all forms of oppression.

Today we are awakening to a new Turkey and a new Middle East.

The youth who have welcomed my call, the eminent women who heeded my call, friends who have accepted my discourse and all people who can hear my voice:

Today a new era is beginning.

The period of armed struggle is ending, and the door is opening to democratic politics.

We are beginning a process focused on political, social and economic aspects; an understanding based on democratic rights, freedoms, and equality is growing.

We have sacrificed much of our lives for the Kurdish people, we paid a high price. None of these sacrifices, none of our struggles, were in vain. For as a consequence of them, the Kurdish people have attained once again their identity and their roots.

We have now reached the point of “silence the weapons and let the ideas and politics speak”. The modernist paradigm that has disregarded, excluded and denied us has been razed to the ground. Regardless of whether it be Turkish, Kurdish, Laz or Circassian — the blood spilled is flowing from a human being and from the bosom of this land.

Witnessed by the millions of people who heed my call, I say a new era is beginning, an era where politics gain prominence over weapons. We have now arrived at the stage of withdrawing our armed forces outside the borders.

I believe that all those who have believed in this cause and me are sensitive to the possible dangers of the process.

This is not an end, but a new beginning. This is not abandoning the struggle — we

are initiating a different struggle.

The creation of geographies based on ethnicity and a single nation is an inhuman fabrication of modernity that denies our roots and our origins.

A great responsibility falls on all of us to create an equal, free and democratic country of all peoples and cultures, befitting the history of Kurdistan and Anatolia. On this occasion of Newroz, I call on the Armenians, Turkomans, Assyrians, Arabs and all other peoples just as much as on the Kurds to behold the flame of freedom and equality — the fire that is lit here today — and embrace it as their own.

Distinguished people of Turkey:

The Turkish people who live in what is called Turkey today — the ancient Anatolia — should recognise that their common life with the Kurds, under the flag of Islam, rests on the principles of amity and solidarity. The rules of amity has and should have no room for conquest, denial, rejection, forced assimilation, or annihilation.

The last century's repressive, annihilationist, and assimilationist policies, based on capitalist modernity, represent the efforts of a ruling elite to deny a long history of amity. They do not represent the will of the people. It is now very clear that this grip of tyranny contradicts both history and rules of amity. In order to be able to leave that lamentable past behind, I call on the two strategic powers of the Middle East to build a democratic modernity befitting our culture and civilisation.

The time has come for dispute, conflict, and enmity to yield to alliance, unity, blessings, and a mutual embrace.

The Turks and Kurds who fell as martyrs together at Çanakkale [the Gallipoli campaign] also went through the War of Independence together, and together they opened the 1920 assembly.

Our common past is a reality that requires us to create a common future. Today the spirit that established the Turkish Grand National Assembly leads the way to the new era.

I call on all oppressed peoples; on women, who are the most long-standing colonised and subjugated class; on all marginalised and excluded creeds, cults, and cultures; on the working class and all subordinated classes; on everyone who has been excluded from the system to take their rightful position in Democratic Modernity and to attain its mentality.

The Middle East and Central Asia are searching for a contemporary modernity and a democratic order that befits their own history. A new model in which all can coexist peacefully and amicably has become an objective need like the need for bread and water. Inevitably, again, the geography and culture of Anatolia and Mesopotamia are guiding it to build such a model.

We are experiencing a more current, more complicated, and more profound version

of the War of Independence that developed in the framework of the [1920] National Pact.

Despite all the mistakes, setbacks, and failures of the past 90 years, we are once again trying to build a model with all the peoples, classes, and cultures who have been victims and have suffered through terrible disasters. I call on all of you to step forward and help achieve an egalitarian, free, and democratic social organisation.

I call on the Kurds, Turkoman, Assyrians and Arabs who were separated despite the National Pact and today have been condemned to live under grave problems and in conflict with one another within the Syrian and Iraqi Arab republics to begin discussions, and reassess as well as to take decisions on their present reality in a “National Solidarity and Peace Conference”.

The breadth and comprehensiveness of the “we” concept has an important place within the history of this land. But in the hands of the narrow and ruling elitists, “we” has been reduced to “one”. It is time to give the “we” concept its old spirit and to implement it.

We shall unite against those who want to divide and make us fight one another. We shall join together against those who want to separate us.

Those who cannot understand the spirit of the age will end up in the dustbin of history. Those who resist the current will fall into the abyss.

The peoples of the region are witnessing a new dawn. The peoples of the Middle East are weary of enmity, conflict, and war. They want to be reborn from their own roots and to stand shoulder to shoulder.

This Newroz is a beacon to us all.

The truths in the messages of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed are being implemented in our lives today with new tidings. People are trying to regain what they have lost.

We do not deny the values of the contemporary civilisation of the West in whole. We indeed take the values of enlightenment, equality, freedom and democracy, and in order to implement them we synthesise them with our own existential values and lifeways.

The basis of the new struggle is thoughts, ideology and democratic politics, and to be able to start a great democratic leap forward.

Greetings to all those who have contributed to this process and strengthened it, and to all to those who have supported the peaceful democratic solution!

I salute all those who take responsibility for the amicable, equal and democratic freedom of peoples!

Long live Newroz, long live the amity of peoples! ■

NOTES

1 Anatolian folk dance. 2 Kurdish folk dance. 3 Black Sea folk dance. 4 Central and Southern Anatolian folk dance.

Selahattin Demirtas: Call for a New Life



My candidacy is not just for a new president, but for a new way of life for Turkey. It is a proposal for rebuilding our fraternity on an equal footing.

Our call is to all the peoples and all the beliefs in Turkey, to build a new life in which all are free to express their differences, free from pressure to conform.

The call for a new life is radical democracy!

I did not become a candidate in order to preside over an authoritarian, bureaucratic, anti-democratic, sexist state. The president we hope for is one who will be with the people on the

streets.

This means ruling together and making everyone a partner in government. This determination not to be ruled, but for all to take part, will mean gains, not for individuals, but for the people.

A new life will grow through the participation of the excluded and those voices against ethnic, religious, sexual and class discrimination which have not been heard up to now.

The new way of life means, in place of the imposition of uniformity, an equal and voluntary union of our differences. We believe that a free and democratic Turkey is

This manifesto was issued by Selahattin Demirtas when he ran for president of Turkey in the August 2014 elections. The text is taken from website of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), <https://hdpenglish.wordpress.com/call-for-a-new-life/>.

possible.

Turkey is at a crossroads. Either we will choose to further consolidate the authoritarian state or we will pave the way for a fundamental change by taking radical democratic measures to realise the desires of all the oppressed.

By gathering the strength of all who object, we have the opportunity to root out the system in which the bureaucratic mechanisms of Ankara make all the decisions. Therefore, while we are presented with three candidates, there are in reality only two political choices.

Our policy: The people administers itself, freely expressing its differences with pride. The people can speak freely and determine their own future.

Faced with this neo-liberal and anti-democratic order, we refuse to make the false choice between nationalism and religious sectarianism.

We believe that the best government is the least government. We aim to make the state smaller and create a system where democracy and citizens' rights prevail. We propose to transform the state, whose current aim is to protect itself and its power, into an efficient vehicle to serve the people.

No longer will the state revolve around one person and the hierarchy around him. Peoples' assemblies will ensure the direct participation of the people in running the state.

We will establish assemblies of women, youth, the disabled, belief groups, cultural and ethnic groups, farmers, workers and labourers. Instead of increasing the powers of the presidency, we will undertake a presidency which will guarantee the increased power of the people.

All the channels of the system will be opened up to the people and be democratised.

Turkey will no longer be run by institutions that defend the status quo or the products of military coups, such as the National Security Council. Strengthened local government and democratic committees will replace these institutions.

The state will no longer audit itself. In place of the State Audit Commission, we will have the Peoples Audit Commission. This is a fundamental pre-condition of an open and transparent state.

The call for a new life is belief in peace!

The will for peace of the peoples of Turkey is the guarantor of the peace process. The determination shown in the presidential election by those who want peace will lay the foundations for a quicker resolution of the peace process.

The solution of the Kurdish problem is an inseparable part of the democratisation of Turkey. As we bring the problem toward solution, Turkey will become more democratic. The more democratic Turkey becomes, the faster we will move toward a

solution.

The will to achieve comes first from those of us who have fought for peace for years and from the forces of democracy in Turkey.

Our candidacy for the presidency has strategic importance for the achievement of a lasting peace. We are aiming for a transformation that will democratise Turkey from top to bottom and root radical democracy in society. This is the objective of our call for change.

Our diversity is our strength, not our weakness.

Our democratic nation is made up of Turks, Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, Greeks, Ezidis, Suryanis, Keldanis, Arabs, Circassians, Laz, Pomaks, and Romanies. We will move away from every form of imposed uniformity to a pluralist democratic model for the nation.

We will move from the era of the state constitution to the era of the peoples' constitution.

The call for a new life is justice!

The architects of our existing constitution were recently given life prison sentences. We have been under the oppression of the Junta's illegitimate constitution for thirty-five years now. To defend the provisions of this constitution is to defend the military coup.

We can no longer postpone the need to completely replace this constitution that sanctifies the state and tramples underfoot peoples, languages, beliefs, and cultures. This has become an urgent need.

We need a non-sexist, ecological, democratic constitution that reflects Turkey's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, religiously diverse and multi-identity reality.

The new constitution must be the foundation document of a Democratic Turkey and should be written by the people.

The call for a new life is freedom for all faiths!

Life together can only be based on equality and freedom.

The pressure on all the oppressed and excluded faiths — Alevis, Christians, Jews, Yezidis — must be lifted. The way must be opened for all faiths and worldviews to coexist freely in a pluralist democracy.

The right to worship in ones mother tongue must be ensured. The Department of Religious Affairs, which exists to make religion serve the official ideology of the state, must be abolished. The state must abandon any attempt to influence or control religion through any institution. All hateful and discriminatory words directed at different beliefs must be removed from school textbooks and all incitement must be punished.

Legal status must be granted to the Alevi djemevis and the places of worship of all

faiths and religions.

We must develop a libertarian secularism that frees all from the state monopoly over religion and enables those of any faith or of none to live freely as they chose.

The call for a new life is green!

From the resistance of the villagers of Bergama to cyanide gold mining in the 1990s to today, attacks on nature are never out of the news.

In every corner of our country we see similar stories with different actors: women of the Black Sea coast beaten by the gendarmerie for resisting the construction of a hydro-electric scheme on their local river, farmers in Thrace protesting the pollution of their waters with industrial waste, and villagers threatened by the construction of nuclear or fossil fuel power stations where they live.

The earth which feeds us, the air that cleans our blood, water which is the source of life, and the other species with which we share the earth: those not prepared to defend this shared inheritance cannot possibly talk about democracy, justice, and humanity.

The right to life is not just a right for people; defending the right to life of all animals is one of our basic principles.

The call for a new life is youth!

Our youth are in revolt against the attempt to force them into a predetermined mould by those who imagine themselves the owners of this country. Our young people are besieged by systemic problems such as unemployment and the failures in education.

The new way of life we are proposing will give voice to our youth.

The “peoples’ assemblies” we will set up will include youth assemblies which will ensure the active participation of young men and women in every arena and remove every legal obstacle to youth self-organisation. Ensuring the effective exercise of the political economic social and cultural rights of young people will be a responsibility of the state.

In place of the mentality that understands youth only as a problem of “maintaining order” without any attempt to deal with the problems facing young people, the new life will give our youth a voice. Our youth will not be led, but will be leaders.

The call for a new life is the right to education!

Education is a public right afforded to every citizen free of charge. Access to education should be opened up to all equally, regardless of language, religion, faith, ethnicity, sex, sexual identity or race. Public expenditure on education must be increased and the education budget should be utilised in a just and equal way.

The educational curriculum should be freed from nationalism and sexism. We

should offer a scientific, democratic, high quality, secular education, without rote learning, that develops the creativity of individuals and that orients students in accordance with their abilities. Compulsory religious education lessons should be abolished and, instead, elective lessons in individuals' own religions should be offered in accord with their own wishes.

Education in one's mother tongue should be recognised as a right. At all levels of education, alongside the teaching of the official language, Turkish, there should be an opportunity to receive education in the student's mother tongue. Education must become multi-lingual on the basis of mother tongue education. It should be made possible, even if only one person requests it, for this right to be exercised without obstruction.

Education should no longer be exam-centric. The Higher Education Council should be abolished and the academic and administrative autonomy of the universities should be strengthened.

The call for a new life is for women!

Every day at least five women are murdered. In this patriarchal society that allows women neither a voice nor a share in power, the oppression and slaughter continue unabated.

We have taken a principled stand against all forms of discrimination against and violence to women. In this, we will continue.

Only if women take a leading role can we achieve our new way of life. Every society is only as free as the women in that society.

The call for a new life means a sexually free society.

The system ignores the fate of those LGBTI individuals who face oppression and murder because of their sexual orientation or sexual identity. The very existence of LGBTI individuals is seen as a crime. Homophobia and transphobia are encouraged. In the new life, every citizen, whatever their sexual identity, will have equal rights and be able to live freely life without facing discrimination.

The call for a new life is for world peace!

Turkey is obliged to make a structural change in its foreign policy. Before, we had a foreign policy that ignored the problems resulting from the period of military domination of Turkish politics. Now we are face to face with the grave consequences of a foreign policy, with Ottoman references, that has the ambition to become a regional power.

Turkish foreign policy perpetuates itself by fanning the flames of sectarian hatred and opening the way for organisations like ISIS. In the West, the EU membership process has virtually come to a halt, as have the related plans for reform in Turkey.

Our radical democratic belief in the possibility that people with different beliefs and identities can live together freely and equally, without assimilation, must also be the basis of our foreign policy.

The call for a new life means get organised!

The neo-liberal period has brought fundamental changes in property relations, production and employment. The production process has been atomised, split into small units and reorganised.

Under the heading of “flexible working”, workers face insecure, subcontracted, uninsured employment conditions that not only divest workers of their basic employment rights, but also rights in all aspects of their lives.

We aim for a presidency that will make direct interventions for the investigation of industrial murders, the prevention of the use of child labour, and the reorganisation of the conditions of seasonal agricultural workers. The new life must guarantee the social rights of all workers, especially those in precarious employment. ■

Figen Yüksekdag: Kurdish Women's Movement Reshapes Turkish Politics



The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has co-chairs for all representative levels. A female and male official share the responsibility. The party is chaired by Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yüksekdag. The HDP has become the fastest-growing political movement in Turkey since the August 2014 election. Following the momentum of the last election, Yüksekdag explained, the HDP is now ready to participate in the next general election as a political party, believing it will be able to acquire at least 10% of the national

vote, the threshold required to enter parliament. Previously, members of the HDP have entered the parliament as independent candidates.

Yüksekdag is a slender woman with a calm smile even under high levels of stress. She has been active in politics since she was 20. She did not fall into politics by coincidence or family connections, but rather chose politics as a career.

A breath of fresh air, Yüksekdag is polite yet quite stern and precise in her choice of words. She overcomes simple slogans in her speeches without being a bore. She is known not to be conformist. Yüksekdag is the leader of a party that seeks to represent diverse groups, yet is most prominently known as the party of Kurds. Yüksekdag is

This interview was taken by journalist Pinar Tremblay for *Al-Monitor*. It was posted on March 25, 2015. The text is taken from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/turkey-women-in-middle-east-figen-yuksekdag.html>.

not Kurdish, although people in Turkey simply assume she is Kurdish or Alevi. Yüsekcdag told *Al-Monitor* that she comes from a Sunni Turkish farming family, proudly carrying the banner for all oppressed people in the Turkish political scene. She was arrested in 2006 and 2009 for her political views. Prior to the establishment of the HDP, she was the co-chair of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP).

The text of the interview follows.

Pinar Tremblay: Only a few years ago, Kurdish women had a reputation in Turkey for being the most oppressed. This perception was reinforced by movies and sitcoms portraying the victimhood of Kurdish women. Now, this has been turned on its head both in Turkey and the region. Kurdish women rock in Turkish politics, also in Kobanê and Rojava [the Kurdish name for the northern area of Syria (Western Kurdistan)] and have become the face of revolution. How did this happen?

Figen Yüsekcdag: The years I started my political career, hundreds of young Kurdish women went to the mountains [to fight] for national freedom. They were on the forefront of the battles of all towns and cities of Kurdistan. So the Kurdish women's movement has a special place among women's liberation process in Turkey. It was meaningful and impressive that in the time when the Kurdish people were suffering under religious pressure as well as feudal culture and financial exploitation, simultaneously thousands of women joined the liberation movement. Women who sacrificed their lives, such as Beritan (Gulnaz Karatas), Zilan (Zeynep Kinaci) and Mizgin (Sema Yuce) became heroic symbols of the movement. They influenced all revolutionary progressive women in Turkey.

As the Kurdish national liberation movement grew, its positive effects on Kurdish women became visible. As hundreds of women became martyrs in the process, it strengthened women's position in Kurdish society. So the Kurdish women paid substantial dues to earn their rights in a way. They did not succumb to the patriarchal set-up within the revolutionary movement, because the resistance of women was not solely against the abusive state but also against patriarchy, violence, honor killings. Their rebellion was both national and social. We see the remnants of this history in today's HDP. Women are indeed half of the party, and are equal members with men. This is not a privilege given to women, rather it is HDP's understanding of how gender equality should be sustained. The developments in Rojava and the resistance in Kobanê are the climax of the movement — indeed Rojava is a women's revolution. Only three years ago, in Rojava, women were suppressed under male dominance. But women entered the public domain with their involvement in the revolution; they changed their destinies. In all leadership posts women and men share the responsibility; female

literacy levels are also rising. Women are establishing an army of their own. The YPJ is the Women's Protection Units, engaged in direct combat. They have become the most secular, enlightened and revolutionary face of Middle Eastern women. Women resist against IS [Islamic State] because they see their sole salvation in fighting. In this way, Kurdish women have become a force to be reckoned with for the whole region.

For the other political parties in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party [AKP], the Republican People's Party [CHP] and the Nationalist Action Party [MHP] women are mostly utilised as window dressing. In the HDP, women are the active players.

Tremblay: Could we say Rojava along with Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain are harbingers of a new leftist movement? Or are these just reactionary movements in the face of increasing racism and austerity measures?

Yüksekdağ: The Arab Spring starting in Tunisia and Egypt were examples of built-up anger against injustice and dictatorship. Rojava happened in the midst of this spirit, showing it is possible to establish a free people's democratic movement in this region. Given the crisis of the capitalist system, we see that suppressed people in Europe are also seeking alternatives. That is how Syriza and Podemos emerged. There is no economic collapse in Turkey, but there are potential signs of economic crisis. Poverty rates are on the rise. The AKP's corruption is also out in the open now, and political rifts in Turkey are too deep. Kurds, Armenians, Alevis, Christians and secular sections of society are all under pressure. The AKP wishes to establish an ultimate Erdogan dictatorship. The HDP appears as a strong alternative for several different oppressed sections of society. In an increasingly connected world, all these social movements influence each other and are connected. The victory of Syriza in neighboring Greece influenced the workers of our country.

Tremblay: And much depends on the success of the peace process. What are your concerns? We have been hearing captured Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan has had crucial demands about sustaining the role of women in the process; any insights for our readers?

Yüksekdağ: It is a turning point in the peace process that the Turkish state now openly considers PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party] leader Abdullah Öcalan as a counterpart. We keep communication channels open and the HDP is actively involved in the process. Our most crucial concern is the AKP's attempts to prolong the process. In the two years of the peace process, the AKP really did not take any meaningful steps, plus continued on their end preparations of war. The AKP has synchronised the peace process to the elections. Their goal again is to sustain the ceasefire until the end of the elections to guarantee a victory. They have failed to deliver on the simplest of mutually agreed items, for instance the release of sick inmates. This rattles the process

and disturbs the confidence of the people.

For Öcalan, women's involvement in politics is crucial, and this is reflected under the "societal demands" section of the 10-item packet that the AKP and the Kurdish delegation agreed. Under the social demands a section guarantees support for women's liberation movement.

Tremblay: Also, the HDP has been successful in bringing the LGBT community, an outcast group in Turkish political scene, under its umbrella. When were you first convinced that the HDP could become a party represented in all of Turkey, not just Kurdistan?

Yüksekdağ: The HDP was established as the party of all oppressed and all peoples. All factions find a voice in the HDP. We must accept that the LGBT community is real. We give all groups, including LGBT community members, access on the basis of merit at all levels. So they feel welcome here. It is difficult to bring together sections of society so different from each other, but as the HDP we always believed in a unified movement of the oppressed in these lands. That is why the HDP was established, so our success and effect on society is a result of this unifying power.

Tremblay: Erdogan has asked the public for votes to garner 400 deputies for the AKP in the June elections. That is about 75% of the total national vote. Your co-chair has explained that this is only possible if both the HDP and the MHP [the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party] remain below the 10% threshold. What is the HDP doing to prevent such a scenario?

Yüksekdağ: Indeed, Erdogan needs 400 deputies to design a new constitution, which will strengthen his dictatorship. Hence the provocation. If there is fighting on the streets, then the public's trust for us would decrease. We faced similar political gimmicks before. We have constantly repeated that we will not be a party to any sort of fighting; our struggle is against the regime. We are preparing against possible provocations of our political base and are communicating with our counterparts, ultranationalists and Islamist Kurds (Hüda-Par). We do have millions of supporters and we owe it to them to beat the AKP's tricks and win at the ballot box. ■

Open letter to the Australian government

Lift the Ban on the PKK

We, the undersigned, note that:

1. Ever since the formation of the republic in 1923, Turkey's large Kurdish population has endured heavy national oppression. Even today, for instance, they are denied public education in their mother tongue.
2. The reason for the persistence of the 'Kurdish question' is the refusal of Turkey's rulers to fundamentally budge on this and the rejection by the Kurdish people of second-class citizenship.
3. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) enjoys the support of millions of Kurdish people in Turkey. It is seen as their legitimate representative and their best hope of securing their national rights.
4. The PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire in March 2013 and began withdrawing its armed units to camps in northern Iraq. In a significant concession, it has dropped its call for an independent Kurdish state and instead calls for autonomy within a democratised Turkey.
5. The PKK seeks to enter into direct negotiations with the Turkish government. Its acknowledged leader, Abdullah Öcalan, jailed in Turkey since 1999, will play a key role in any such negotiations and the PKK wants his harsh conditions of imprisonment significantly eased to facilitate this.
6. The PKK has played a key role in the struggle against the inhuman 'Islamic State' gangs in both Iraq and Syria. It has also played a fundamental role in mobilising support within Turkey for Kobanê and Rojava (the Kurdish-majority liberated region in northern Syria). It has close fraternal relations with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the main party in Rojava.

This Open Letter (now closed) is a project of the Australians for Kurdistan solidarity committee in Melbourne. For background material relating to the campaign to take the PKK off the Australian government's list of terrorist organisations, visit australiansforkurdistan.org.

7. Despite this proven anti-terrorist role, the US, European Union and Australian governments continue to proscribe the PKK as a terrorist organisation.
8. Listing an organisation means that it is illegal for Australian citizens to belong to it, raise funds for it or in any way to actively support it. The PKK was first placed on the Australian list of terrorist organisations at the end of 2005 and has remained there ever since. The listing comes up for review in August 2015.¹
9. The government's stated case for this listing is extremely weak. It says absolutely nothing about the severe discrimination faced by the Kurdish population of Turkey. It says nothing about the regime's crimes against its Kurdish minority. It smears the PKK by claiming it raises funds by drug-running and prostitution rackets.² It tries to criminalise its legitimate right to self-defence against oppression. It says nothing about the PKK's push for negotiations. Then, to top it all off, it admits that the PKK poses no threat to Australia.³

We therefore argue that:

- Good-faith negotiations between the Turkish government and the PKK are the only realistic way to resolve this long-running conflict. Australia and the West should use all their influence to push for genuine constructive talks.
- The PKK's inclusion on Western terrorist lists is an obstacle to fruitful negotiations. The PKK should be de-listed. In particular, we call on the Australian government to remove the PKK from its list of terrorist organisations.

Selected endorsements

3CR, Community Radio, VIC

Australian Kurdish Association, NSW

Wendy Bacon, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, Professor, NSW

Sue Bolton, Socialist Alliance, City of Moreland councillor, VIC

Bob Brown, Bob Brown Foundation, Former Greens senator, TAS

Verity Burgmann, Monash University, Professor, VIC

Phillip Deery, Victoria University, Professor, VIC

Carole Ferrier, University of Queensland, Professor, QLD

Tim Gooden, Geelong Trades Hall Council, Secretary, VIC

Greens NSW, NSW

John Haddad, Beth-Nahrin Cultural Club, Assyrian activist, VIC

Sylvia Hale, Former Greens state MP, NSW

Stephen Jolly, City of Yarra, Councillor, VIC

Damien Kingsbury, Deakin University, Professor, VIC

Kurdish Association of Victoria, VIC

Colin Long, NTEU (Victorian Division), Secretary, VIC

Scott Ludlum, Australian Greens, Senator, WA

Maritime Union of Australia (Sydney Branch), NSW

Helen Meekosha, University of NSW, Social scientist, NSW

Aran Mylvaganam, Tamil activist & union organiser, VIC

Jamie Parker, Greens NSW, State member for Balmain, NSW

Warren Smith, Maritime Union of Australia, Assistant national secretary, NSW

Rob Sary, Civil liberties lawyer, VIC

Sally Thompson, Adult Learning Centre, CEO, VIC

Sam Wainright, Socialist Alliance, City of Fremantle councillor, WA

Cam Walker, Friends of the Earth, Environmental activist, VIC

Brian Walters QC, Barrister, VIC

Andrew Wilkie, Federal MP, Independent member for Denison, TAS

Arnold Zable, Writer, VIC

NOTES

1 On August 11, 2015 the government re-listed the PKK without public hearings. **2** On the government's amended entry for the PKK on its national security website, these claims have been removed. **3** This admission no longer appears on the national security website entry for the PKK.

The eruption of the brutal fundamentalist 'Islamic State' in the Middle East has placed the Kurdish people in Iraq, Syria and Turkey at the centre of the political stage.

The most effective opposition to the Islamic State killers has come from the revolutionary democratic wing of the Kurdish freedom movement. That is, from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), the defence forces of Rojava, the Kurdish-majority liberated territory in northern Syria.

The Rojava Revolution has attracted increasing interest and admiration around the world because of its unyielding resistance to the Islamic State and the heavy and unprecedented involvement of women in the fighting forces.

In Turkey the Democratic Freedom Party (HDP) and the outlawed PKK are struggling, in different conditions, for the same thing. The great success of the HDP in the June 7, 2015 parliamentary elections was based on an appeal, not only to the downtrodden Kurdish population, but to all those across the country suffering oppression, discrimination and exploitation.

This pamphlet concentrates on the Kurdish struggle in Rojava and Turkey. It aims to provide information and perspective on these tremendously important developments and, hopefully, furnish a basis for more active solidarity in Australia.

Resistance books