

'MUJERES LIBRES' *women fighting for their freedom & ideology*

Mujeres Libres were a female Anarchist organisation formed in Spain in 1936. They mobilised nearly 30,000 women and developed an extensive network of activities designed to empower individual women through education, literacy and healthcare programs. They were deeply committed to the larger anarchist movement and its goals but wished to be independent and to focus attention on the problems that were of particular concern to women: illiteracy, economic dependence, exploitation, and ignorance about health, childcare, and sexuality.

When the civil war broke out they were active in the workers collectives and militias where they fought alongside the men as equals and also organised propaganda campaigns. Their activities in Spain were brought to an abrupt halt by the victory of Franco's forces in February 1939.

In the Kurdish area of Rojava in Northern Syria a similar revolution is taking place. Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned Kurdish leader of the PKK has rethought the Kurdish issue, its aims and tactics. The PKK no longer seeks to create a Kurdish state. Instead it is calling for Kurds to create free, self-governing communities, based on principles of direct democracy. Councils, assemblies and popular militias have been formed, regime property has been turned over to worker-managed co-operatives, education and literacy programs have been established.

Ecology and feminism are central pillars of this system, ideas largely unheard of in a part of the world that is traditionally home to extreme patriarchal oppression. To be born female is to be at risk of violent or sexual abuse, childhood or forced marriages, honor killings, polygamy, discrimination, illiteracy and more.

The women of Rojava now participate fully in public life: at every level of politics, society and even military. The people's protection units (YPG) have been joined by the **YPJ**, or **women's protection units**. The YPJ, is a female-only paramilitary force that has been fighting, and winning, against ISIS and the Syrian Army. They have a fierce intellectual and emotional commitment not only to their community's survival but also to its political ideas and aspirations.

Just as it is in the case with the Libertarians in the Spanish Civil War, the Revolution in Rojava envisions itself as a solution to the problems in the whole country, not as an expression of separatist tendencies. It points to a different future of the Middle East, based on direct participation, women's emancipation and ethnic peace.

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