

Freedom Shall Prevail

Thank you Doug and Clare, and all of GFTU and Estella for organizing this important discussion and inviting me on behalf of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan."

Perhaps we do not have the time to fully delve into the roots of capitalism, but let me just suffice by saying that it can only be sustained by war. At the end of the nineteenth- and beginning of the twentieth-century the system faced profound crises, with contradictions that could only be resolved by world wars. The periods before, in between, and after the two world wars have shown this to be the case. With real socialism and its variants, the war changed in quality and transitioned from a hot war to the Cold War. The unraveling of real socialism in 1989 made the system literally fall into a kind of void, having no one to attack. It had to produce a new enemy, which it soon found in Islam with Middle East roots.

This new period, which had a complicated beginning, including the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, faces dynamics that will redefine not only the Middle East but also the fate of the system. We have already seen that the encounter between the oldest and the newest in the civilization's birthplace promises to be full of surprises that will determine the future form of our civilization.

It has now been 20 years since 9/11. But it was two years earlier on 9 October, 1998 that Abdullah Öcalan was forced out of Syria. Öcalan would later say that the US wanted to initiate an intervention into Middle East via the Kurdish question through the elimination of the most effective organizational force of the Kurdish people and their freedom. Öcalan came to Europe in search of a political and peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. Instead, more than twenty-two years ago, on 15 February 1999, in an international clandestine NATO operation, he was kidnapped in Nairobi, Kenya's capital, and brought to Turkey. Before that, Öcalan was known in Kurdistan, but he and the Kurds were hardly known to the world at large so those who thought this would be an easy operation were wrong. Because this changed when Kurds in all four parts of Kurdistan and worldwide took to the streets to

Havin Guneser's Speech at the GFTU Fringe Meeting

protest this clandestine operation and his abduction, perhaps not allowing for the full plan to succeed and at the same time raising Öcalan's profile both internationally and at home.

The abduction of Abdullah Öcalan was an early example of what would soon become known as "unlawful renditions" and marked a new string of interventions into Middle East. İmralı Island thus became a precursor of the infamous Guantanamo detention center. In 1999, the Kosovo war ended with NATO collectively attacking a sovereign country for the first time. After the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Bush declared a "War on Terror" in October, invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Beginning with the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan from Kenya, invasion of Afghanistan, interventions in the Middle East and North Africa continue today.

Today, all the principles and institutions that were the result of two world wars and the struggle of peoples and women are not in effect anymore. Day by day, all rights are being taken away, parliaments and international bodies have become functional only when it serves the elites. Capitalism has shown that it truly is able to make a buck from anything, including the Covid-19 situation, with far reaching changes in the system to the detriment of the oppressed and exploited.

We are seeing that more and more instead of traditional armies, the people are being polarized within the society and mainly the men are being used as paramilitary forces of the system to take back the already won rights and further repress the demands by the youth, the women, peoples, workers, LGBTQ+ and others.

In this polarization we are being stripped off what makes us a society, the responsibilities we have towards each other, and the balance with the nature is all but being destroyed. Öcalan says that "No dominant social system has attacked and destroyed the foundations of society and the natural environment as extremely as capitalism. The unraveling of all moral values at the core of society, the massive growth of a nationalism that has infiltrated every mentality, and the consequences of ecological destruction, which have spread and created a robotic sameness, a gray, hopeless, faithless, and aimless worldview. The dominant psychology and social atmosphere of the crisis is characterized by stress, anger, hatred, violence, extreme compulsiveness, individual loneliness, social

## Havin Guneser's Speech at the GFTU Fringe Meeting

worthlessness, and a relationship logic totally locked into self-interest, disinterest in humanism, and the increasing loss of any meaning to life.”

There is a huge attempt at changing the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the worker; by making the workers more dependent on the bosses for daily needs and by creating huge unemployment at the same time. Faced with even greater danger of lower wages, the identity of the workers is being changed in a way that it is no longer a revolutionary force and that it is stripped off of its radicalness. And so that it becomes more and more difficult for those actually suffering under the system—the gigantic army of the unemployed, colonized peoples, ethnic and religious groups, and the overwhelming majority of women—to come together to wage the struggle for freedom and a meaningful life.

All these—and by that I mean: the increase in war, even within society itself, the very dangerous forms of politics, the increasing poverty and unemployment, the loss of the moral foundations of society, and a robot-like, alienated existence—represent existential threats to humanity.

Amid continuous bloodbaths and ongoing environmental disaster, the status quo in the Middle East has been gutted and the chaos in the region and throughout the world is consistently deepening. As we mentioned already, all the principles and institutions that were the result of two world wars and the struggle of peoples and women are not in effect anymore. Turkey can easily occupy large chunks of Kurdistan in Syria and in Iraq and actively attack and try and suppress any struggle for freedom. But we should not think that Turkey roams on its own. This is the new role given to Turkey by NATO: Turkey is now the force you employ to control the Middle East, it is the cheap holiday resort, it is the new rubbish dump, or the place where you stop those who want to flee wars created by these very same powers. Imagine this and the reason why: you can recognize a multitude of misogynist and racist imperial religious structures that unleash fascist rule, but you declare the PKK terrorist, or not recognize the democratic autonomy of Rojava, of the North-East Syria and the democratic autonomy of Shengal of the Yazidi people, or democratic autonomy of Kurds in Turkey. I guess this is what Turkey gets as payback: the freedom to do what it likes to Kurds in return for being the gendarmerie for imperial powers.

So although it may seem paradoxical, the Kurds and Abdullah Öcalan, almost nonexistent and little known twenty-five years ago, are an increasingly recognized force that represent hope around the world. They have not treated their captivity at the hands of a number of occupying powers as a source of resentment but, on the contrary, have used it to demonstrate that the only way out of the existing quagmire is solidarity and the freedom of women and of peoples; the freedom of one is simultaneously the freedom of the other. They have dealt a heavy blow to the Dark Ages that ISIS, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Turkish state, among others, hope to unleash in the Middle East. In the process, they have shown the possibility of a path out of the crisis to another, a brighter future based on women's freedom, an ecological economy and a democratic society. Embodied in and primarily known as the revolution in Rojava, they inspire and give hope to millions around the world.

This is why today it is more important than ever to demand freedom for Abdullah Öcalan. For Abdullah Öcalan's continued incarceration has become the symbol of a Middle East drowning in dark times, and his release has become the symbol of freedom, even in a place most unexpected. Over the years Öcalan's ideas and their practice are directly connected to his aggravated incarceration. Because these ideas are practiced and find roots among the people, his jailers want him to be forgotten. By shutting Öcalan in a far off island prison with an illegal ban on lawyer and family visits—and no one has heard from him or seen since 2019 only a 3 minute telephone call with his brother early this year—and declaring the PKK terrorist they hope to marginalize the Kurdish freedom movement and persuade others not to show support and solidarity.

However, no single section of society can overcome this chaos alone. No one can just save the day. We cannot save this very day without grappling with the roots of our problems and uniting in our struggles. This is why we cannot shy away from our responsibilities, no matter where we are.

As we witness, nothing is tying down the governments and states, they are roaming free, free to ethnic cleanse, free to keep people in prison, free to pillage social values and natural resources. We must be that force that holds these states to principles. We must be that force who use words and actions to show that freedom shall prevail. Chains of oppression can be broken, and that moment is

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now. Öcalan says "The time has come" to create new laws of meaning and the structures they require.

With each year, the outrage about Öcalan's abduction and the demand for his freedom have grown, uniting people across continents. It is in this vein that I want to stress the importance and the responsibility and the solidarity that the trade unions like the GFTU, Unite the Union and many others have shown by setting up the freedom for Öcalan campaign. We must now drive this campaign further, and be that force in the UK that holds the government to responsibility. Again I would like to extend many thanks to all of you for making this possible, and to Doug Nicholls, Simon Dubbins, Clare Baker, Manuel Cortes, Estella from Peace in Kurdistan and many many others.

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