

A Discussion Paper on Local Councils in Syria

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Introduction: The Period of Power and the Period of Revolution

A revolution is an exceptional event that will alter the history of societies, while changing humanity itself. It is a rupture in time and space, where humans live between two periods: the period of power and the period of revolution. A revolution's victory, however, is ultimately achieving the independence of its time in order to move into a new era. The Syrian Revolution has entered its eighth month and still has days ahead in its struggle to overthrow the regime and unlock new areas of life. The authoritative control on the territories is relatively present, but its scope of power differs from region to region, from day to day, and from hour to hour throughout the same day. During the past, continuous demonstrations were able to break the dominance of absolute power in certain areas. It was the continuation of demonstrations that produced a National Council that included a broad spectrum of mass movements, organizations, and political parties, which were counted on to represent a legitimate alternative authority to the Arab and international communities. The National Council is imperative in order to accomplish the efforts required to protect the Syrian people from the regime and its brutality.

However, the revolutionary movement remains independent of daily human activities and is unable to interfere with everyday lives. Although the public still manages as they did in the past, there are "divisions of daily work" between day-to-day activities and revolutionary activities. This means that the social formations in Syria live in two overlapping times: the period of power, in which the regime still manages everyday activities, and the period of the revolution, in which activists work daily to overthrow the regime. The risk lies not in the overlap of the two periods, for that is the nature of revolutions, but rather in the absence of correlation between the spheres of daily life and the revolution itself. So, what is feared of the movement during the coming period is one of two things: humans becoming bored due to the continuity of the revolution and its disruption of their daily lives, or humans resorting to the use of heavy weaponry, causing the revolution to become the rifle's hostage.

Accordingly, the efforts one must undertake in order to independently detach his or her social formations under authority and separate "the period of power and the period of revolution" is the extent in which the revolution will successfully create an atmosphere of victory. It must be recalled that the past months were rich trials of several focuses in the areas of emergency medical and legal support, and now, we must urgently enrich these initiatives to include broader areas of life. The blending of life in a revolution is an inherent requirement for its continuation and its victory. It requires a socially flexible structure that is based on the collaboration between the revolution and the daily lives of humans. This form of structure will be called: the local council.

The purpose of this entrance, and what is followed in the discussion paper, is to research the feasibility of the formation local councils with members from diverse cultures who belong to different social divisions, yet are working together to achieve the following:

- To support the people in managing their own lives independent of institutions and state agencies
- To form a space for collective expression that supports the collaboration of individuals promotes daily and political activities
- To initiate activities of the social revolution at a district level and unify supporting frameworks

As time passes, the course of human life for individuals and families transforms into one of a constant search for safer places to live. This course in time also transforms daily work into tireless efforts to discover what has happened to missing loved ones. Thus, families persistently work to access information regarding detainment locations and rely on their general knowledge or relatives to assess the areas of detention.

The role of local councils is to transfer such misery from what would usually fall under “the period of power” into a process that includes a unique community initiative.

The council must, at a minimum, work on the following:

i. Find safe housing for families coming new into the regime and provide them with needed supplies. The council located in that region must collaborate with its counterpart, the local council from the region that the families initially fled from.

ii. Organize statements for the detainees and transfer the information to concerned authorities in the revolution. The council must arrange to contract legal authorities and must provide support to the families by issuing follow-ups on the conditions of loved ones in detention.

iii. Manage the request reports of affected families and work to ensure the expenses through financial aid for the public and “regional revolution funds.”

Such acts demand organization, proper management of information, and knowledge of the arts of administration; however, this is not impossible despite the given type of rebellious environment. The revolution has nurtured a generation of experts in organizing demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins that are capable of arrangements and work management specialties carried out innately by the people.

This revolutionary responsibility must not replace relatives or acquaintances (or at least during the first stage) and should not be binding in any way. Humans will begin to feel comfortable out of state services, and those who find temporary alternatives for kinship relations need time and practice in order to enter into contact and collective social behavior sophisticatedly and effectively.

The Topic of Exchange Between Human Beings: The Formation of New Participants

- Provide a venue for discussion in which human beings are able to trade and search for solutions to daily issues
- Build horizontal links between the local councils of one geographic region and expand to include links between different geographic regions

The revolution transformed individuals themselves to broaden the horizons of their own lives once they ensured that the conflict was their means of liberation and, thus, marked their continuity and cooperation with the struggle enduringly. They were able to discover their newly defined capabilities of innovation and invention, of rich social engagements and assorted colors, that were different than what they had initially entrusted while being restricted under a single tyrannical killer for half a century.

Here, the local council’s role is activating the people’s cooperation and transferring it into their living spaces, which will vary in the nature of their activities and their movement in the face of authority, namely:

i. Encourage people to discuss their conditions every day (in regards to their livelihoods and daily demands) and to solve specified issues collectively.

ii. Consider the issues that require solutions outside the scope of the given locality, such as finances or support from other areas.

The Topic of Land: Collective Rediscovery

- Defend the territories of the region that the state seeks to expropriate or has already acquired.

The State's acquisition of land in the cities and suburbs of Syria and its entailed population redeployment are foundations of its policy for domination and social exclusion. The State thus relies on these strategies to ensure its power. This policy has worked to form "safe" residential areas for officials and army officers, for shopping areas, and for the implementation of business plans in order to accommodate the wealthy. The revolutionary movement that we are witnessing in the rural and suburb areas of Syria is one aspect of the people's rejection of the State's expropriation and marginalization policies.

The role of the local council is the direct defense of property from State squatters, by any means necessary. It is imperative to take action through:

- Intervening quickly with properties that are subject to expropriation resolutions.
- Communicating with legal networks of the revolution to raise cases before the courts and challenge the decisions of acquisition in hopes of cancellation or, at the very least, postponement.
- Making the defense of the property and land an issue that concerns that masses of residents in the area collectively.

Configuration of Local Councils:

- The formation of local councils is related to the ability of movement in each region, which means it will be harder to accomplish in areas that are subject to heavy security presence and relatively easier in areas where revolutionary movement is more empowered.
- The achievements of the local council will be a gradual process according to the people's circumstances, demands, and interactions with it.
- The success achieved by each of the councils will be measured through experience and an increase in designated members.
- The configuration of local councils will not be an easy task, though it will be the basis for the continuity of the revolution. The difficulty of formation will not only be due to the suffocating security collar and siege, but also new and unfamiliar practices in life and social relationships. This situation demands an independent entity that is separate from the authority, in which the role of the body will be to support and develop economic and social activities in the area of its presence, while having an experienced administration in various fields.

- In the beginning, the program of the local councils must be applied in locations that have the most appropriate conditions. These localities will serve as pilot areas in order to correctly measure the proper formation of councils in other areas that are subjected to the toughest of conditions.
- Due to the absence of the electoral practice under the current circumstances, the local councils must be made up of social workers and laureates who are respected by the public, have expertise in social, organizational, and technical areas, and the potential and desire to commit themselves to voluntary work.
- The launch of local councils in stages will be in accordance with the priorities of the regime and those who will support its creation:

- i. Local council members
- ii. Regional activists
- iii. Volunteer activists from outside the area that have experience in their respective fields of work

The Role of the National Council

The Council plays a pivotal role in the following matters:

- The legitimacy of the initiative: the National Council must adopt the idea of local councils, which will provide it with necessary legitimacy to launch, and facilitate acceptance by the activists in the sector.
- Funding: The National Board of Directors must accept financing the “Revolution Funds,” which in itself is a job the Council must fulfill. It allows greater flexibility in covering the establishment of local councils by covering all expenses of creation and costs that may not be covered by the region itself.
- The National council must facilitate the coordination between regions and raise the expectation of organization to the framework of entire provinces, for each area and each locality is still based on initiatives that are in accordance to their reckoned mobility. This independence undoubtedly proves the great flexibility in the movement, regardless that it was most affected by the absence of accommodating spaces. The role played by the National Council here is essential in finding a common ground and a closer interdependence between different regions.

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