

# Self-organization in the Syrian people's revolution

Monday 1 July 2013, by [NAISSE Ghayath](#) (Date first published: 1 June 2013).

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By force and through ruthless repression, the ruling clan was able to consolidate a military-police dictatorship that crushed for more than forty years any hint of opposition or independent activity. This dictatorship rests on loyalty to the state apparatus, based on family and regional or even religious ties, and widespread corruption. It also relies on its organic links with the bourgeoisie and all the religious or denominational hierarchies.

Neo-liberal socio-economic policies, accelerated by the savage repression of any popular or working-class protest since the early 2000s, have had devastating effects: the share of capital in GDP rose to 72 per cent in 2005, over a third of the population fell below the poverty line (less than \$1 a day) and nearly half live around this threshold (\$ 2 or less a day).

This is a genuine popular revolution; the driving social forces are the workers and more broadly the impoverished urban and rural social strata. These forces have been able to create, despite the outrageous violence of the regime, a popular armed resistance, in the cruelly felt absence of a revolutionary political leadership. They have created structures of self-organization and coordinating bodies, as well as embryos of self-government, local councils and civil advice bureaus. These forms of control and administration from below are more developed in the Syrian revolution than in any other process in the countries of the region.

The following documents are part of a publication on the current experiences of local councils, published in issue number 13 of the newspaper Al Khatt Al Amami ("The Front Line") of the Current of the Revolutionary Left in Syria. Some of the articles are taken from the website of the critical democratic opposition Zaman Alwasl, established in Homs in 2005.

**Ghayath Naisse**

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## Documents

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## **1. A report on the local councils**

The General Commission of the National Coalition presented at its meeting a report on the local councils in Syria. This report goes back to the beginnings of the revolution, which coincided with the humanitarian crisis caused by the violence of the regime, causing suffering to a very great number of people in all the cities and villages. People began by offering offer basic services to people in need, but with the increased needs, individuals and small groups could not continue to provide these services without cooperating or coordinating with others.

From this there originated the local councils, which reflect the sense of responsibility and the ability of citizens to take steps to run their own affairs, based on their own frameworks, experiences and energy (...). This leads us to affirm the strategic necessity of the project of local councils, and the importance of supporting them by all possible means (...) free of partisan, racial or ideological considerations. The councils are a concrete demonstration which belies the assertions about the spread of anarchy and disorganization because of the present revolutionary situation or the fall of the regime. All the declarations regarding the ability of Syrians to find an alternative to the Assad regime, to ensure stability and security by meeting the basic needs of the population and leading it towards development, remain theoretical and devoid of credibility in the absence of this concrete example which will prove to the Syrian people and to the world the possibility of such an alternative.

The local councils in Syria constitute an administrative structure for managing the daily lives of citizens in the absence of the state (...). They exist in various forms, in areas still under the control of the regime as well as in those which have liberated themselves. They are entirely run by the people.

### ***Leadership and representation***

The report states that running things is up to the individuals and groups who have offered their services to a large number of needy people, in the best way possible and with a long-term perspective. Most of the material and moral support was provided by Syrians in the country and those abroad, until the needs become immense. That is when fundraising began abroad (...). The decisions regarding distribution of aid were usually taken by the person who provided it. But the

need was felt for a method of distribution that was more thought-out and more just, getting away from quotas and considerations based on belonging to a particular group. This is the role that local councils are trying to fill. This is what will give them national credibility (...).

Due to the exceptional circumstances through which Syria is living, it is clear – according to the report – that the methods of choosing representatives cannot be as exemplary as in elections held under favourable circumstances. It is necessary to make permanent efforts to achieve the most scrupulous representation at all levels of government. The report indicates that the local councils take care to be in contact with the revolutionary opposition groups, civil or military. In addition to the above objectives, they play an important role in the revolution through the provision of civil services to these groups, designed to help them continue their work (...).

The report shows that the main objective of the local councils at this stage is to fill the void left by the state, by providing public services to the greatest number and in the best conditions. It is a question of forming the embryos of the municipalities that will be elected tomorrow, in liaison with the future provisional government. The essential objective is to fill the administrative and organizational void by providing services to the public. This means managing civilian life in the fields of education, cleanliness, water and electricity supply, fuel, civil status, the distribution of aid (...). The councils must provide services according to need, in terms of aid, medicine, information, civil defense, law, reconstruction and administrative, professional and media development. Whether their purpose is the defence of the popular movement or guaranteeing the functioning of social networks, they help to reinforce the values of community life and civic culture. They also aim to preserve the institutions of the state, public buildings and private property, and to protect citizens, in cooperation and coordination with the military brigades and councils.

### ***The values to disseminate***

The report states that the action of the local councils, in all areas of civil power, shall disseminate core values, including commitment to the goals of the revolution: realizing the aspirations of the people, mutual respect for the establishment of a homogeneous functional milieu, governed by friendship and cooperation (...).

The principles are those of consultation and election, of decisions taken without despotism or in an arbitrary way, within a framework of loyalty, transparency and sharing, of creation, innovation and perseverance, with the aim of developing interactive exchanges between all components of society, of strengthening coordination and complementarity, of equality of rights between Syrians without discrimination based on religious, ethnic or national criteria.

The report highlights the many difficulties that the local councils have faced, which have weakened them and which they are working to resolve. Not the least of these problems is inexperience, since the local councils were constituted in a situation of crisis (...). To this must be added the lack of clear definitions on the level of responsibilities and prerogatives, the difficulty in ensuring the soundness and the veracity of the information that makes it possible to assess needs and thus develop plans of action.

### ***The stages in the creation of the local councils***

The report examines the stages in the creation of the local councils. The first meeting was held in early July 2012 in the presence of representatives from Latakia, Homs, Deraa, Damascus and its suburbs, Hassaka and Idleb, and in the latter part of the meeting, from Aleppo. Its aim was to discuss the idea of local councils and to open channels of contact between governorates to ensure better coordination between revolutionaries. Out of this meeting came a committee responsible for

monitoring representation, consisting of seven persons for each governorate, whose task was to outline a unified set of rules for functioning.

The second meeting, three weeks later in Istanbul, was of the monitoring committee. The revolutionary situation in each governorate and the mechanisms for selecting the seven representatives from each governorate were presented. Representatives of Latakia, Homs, Deraa, Damascus and its suburbs, Dir, Hassaka and Idleb attended.

The third meeting was held in Ankara two weeks later, in the presence of representatives of Latakia, Homs, Deraa, Damascus and its suburbs, Dir, Hassaka, Idleb, Hama and Aleppo. This meeting drafted a unified set of rules that the monitoring committee would present directly to the revolutionaries within Syria (...).

Source: <http://www.zamanalwsl.net/readNews.php?id=35993>

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## **2. The local council of a border village**

A local council was established in Aqrabat, a village situated on the Syrian-Turkish border, in the Idleb region. It comprises ten offices, including relief, finance, services, justice, security, education and medicine.

Captain Abdessalam Abderrazak, liaison officer of the council, told Zaman Alwasl: "The council was established on the basis of uniting all the populations through representation of their families. The founding committee has twenty members who represent these families. The need for such a council was felt because of the resurgence of the problem of internally displaced persons". He mentioned the need for organization and services to compensate for the void resulting from the absence of the state as regards security and subsistence, "as a result of the reprisals of the regime against the liberated regions, depriving them of all vital services".

Regarding the projects of the local council for the coming days, Abderrazak spoke of the construction of an oven that would serve the village and the nearby camps, where there are forty thousand refugees, the establishment of a police station to maintain security, the reactivation of the judicial office through an Implementation Committee respected by the entire population, and finally he mentioned the possible installation of an electric generator. Zaman Alwasl has learned from different sources within the council that it identifies impoverished families in the village in order to meet their needs. The proposed automatic oven should also provide dozens of jobs to those who have been unfairly dismissed from government employment.

The sources indicated that the quintessence of the democratic experiment was demonstrated by the election of the president of the council; two administratively competent people were candidates and one was elected by a difference of one vote. The population of Aqrabat is about two thousand; the creation of local councils in the Idleb region is considered as an important step on the road to building a free Syria.

Source: <http://zamanalwsl.net/readNews.php?id=35814>

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### 3. A democratic dream has been realized in Deir Ezzor

Under the bombardments, the opposition is organizing local elections in the “liberated” areas of the city in an election which is a first in 40 years. In the galleries of the old market town of Deir Ezzor, which is daily prey to mortar fire and is the scene of violent clashes, a free electoral process “was organized for the first time in forty years” as it was described by Khadr, a member of the local council of the opposition which was elected on Sunday by the inhabitants of the “liberated” areas.

Khadr won one of the five seats on the “local council” in Deir Ezzor. Opponents of the regime, among them combatants, decided to create such councils, which administer the affairs of the populations in the zones evacuated by the forces of the regime and abandoned by the government. The newly elected official said: “This is a historic day for all the inhabitants of Deir Ezzor; they feel free to elect the person they believe can help”.

In the neighbourhoods outside the control of the regular forces in the East of the country, signs call on people to vote and leaflets are distributed in the commercial areas.

It is in the neighborhood of Sheikh Yassin, underground, that dozens of voters, sheltering from the heavy rain and the mortar shells, check the list of candidates. Oum Chadi, 56, said she would vote for the first time in her life and added: “I want to vote to tell Bashar that all that we were asking for at the beginning was free elections like this, to participate in making decisions in our country”. Her son was killed six months ago, fighting against regular troops (...).

Abdelhamid, a former engineer who oversaw the election process, said that “people came despite the bombing to support the revolution (...) this is a way for them to confront the regime without resorting to arms.”

Today, nearly 200,000 people live in Deir Ezzor, according to activists, whereas before the population was more than 750,000, many of whom have fled the violence. A resident said, on condition of anonymity: “In the past, elections were held to show Syrian democracy to the world, while the winners were all in the Baath party”, which has governed Syria for half a century.

Abdulmajid, 75, who put his voting slip in the ballot box to applause, declared: “The Assad family has ruled for forty years, the time for change has come,” and recalled that it “did not come to power in a democratic way”, referring to the coup that brought the former president Hafez Al Assad, father of the current president, to power in 1970, whereas “the Syrian regime wants to convince the world that our uprising is illegitimate. We are only asking for what we were robbed of”, and he continued: “Democracy will return to Syria.” Another voter, Mohammad Ahmad, said that Syrians “want a democratic state, not an Islamic state. We dream of a secular state governed by civilians, not by mullahs.” The Free Syrian Army has banned its members from participating in the elections. For the commander of the battalion fighting in the city, “it is an opportunity to listen to the voices of civilians. We are working to fight the regime ”(...)

Source: <http://middle-east-online.com/id=150017>

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#### **4. The local council of the municipality of Maadan**

The “liberated” areas are full of examples of successful administration by local councils, which demonstrate the ability of people to organize their affairs, a flagrant refutation of attempts to alert the media about “the coming anarchy.”

The answer comes from Maadan (Raqqqa region), in the person of Nawaf Alaali, delegate of the partially liberated town, who depicts it as “a model that inspires pride as regards good administration”.

He says that the local council runs the area with “very limited resources”, highlighting the absence of any kidnapping or theft. Alaali, delegate of the local councils of Raqqqa, speaks of the security and preservation of all containers of cereals, because “not a single grain was stolen, despite the lack of bread”.

He says that the local council has protected public services and maintained them in good order, as it also has the schools, which function “despite the lack of salaries for civil servants and teachers,” highlighting the fact that an education commission within the council is beginning to amend the programme after having removed the paragraphs eulogizing the Baath regime.

Alaali reveals that the village is now preparing to host a satellite channel that will highlight this exemplary role in the administration of liberated areas.

Source: <http://www.zamanalwsl.net/readNews.php?id=35824>

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#### **5. The general constituent congress of the local council of the governorate of Raqqqa**

Information Office of Free Tell Abiad, 16 February 2013.

Today there was held in free Tell Abiad the general constituent congress of the local council of the governorate of Raqqqa. It was attended by fifty members representing Raqqqa, Tell Abiad, Suluk, Alibajalia, Maadan, Tabaka, Alkarama and Sabkha.

We proceeded to choose the presiding officer, the oldest member of the council, Dr. Hamad Soltan, and also his deputy, the reporter of the meeting and the secretary. There was a discussion on the proceedings of the conference and an agreement on a percentage of representation of each area (...). Then the local councils of Tell Abiad Maadan, Tabaka and Alkarama spoke, and for civil society the youth association of Tell Abiad intervened.

The elections were conducted by secret ballot. Four people had applied for the post of president of the council. Professor Saad Chaouich got 25 votes. We then elected the vice-presidents. Then there was consensus on the 15-member executive committee and five members were chosen as members of the control commission.

There will be a press conference today to comment on the details of this historic democratic event.

Tell Abiad will be the temporary seat of the local council of the governorate of Raqqa, until the liberation of the town (...).

## **Current of the Revolutionary Left**

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Appeal for solidarity with Syrian revolutionaries

The Syrian people has since March 2011 decided to revolt against a ferocious dictatorship, for its emancipation, freedom, dignity and social justice.

The Assad dictatorship responded to the peaceful demands of protesters with unprecedented violence, leading to tens of thousands dead, hundreds of thousands injured and imprisoned, millions of displaced persons and refugees and ravaged and destroyed towns and neighborhoods.

The Syrian revolution is a genuine popular revolution. It has been able to thwart the attempts of the dictatorial regime to transform it into a sectarian war. The people in revolt is firmly attached to its independence from any attempt to impose hegemony.

The Current of the Revolutionary Left in Syria is engaged in this democratic and revolutionary social dynamic. It needs our help and our support to strengthen its role and its ability to intervene in the popular struggles in Syria. Long live the people's revolution in Syria! Long live international solidarity!

The Syria Solidarity Association (Association Solidarité Syrie, an association registered in France) aims to assist the Current of the Revolutionary Left.

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