

Shutting down Athens Indymedia: state repression of the Greek anarchist movement

Anarchist Federation of Scotland

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The last few years have been a time of global capitalist crisis, where the financial system has, after two decades of frantic over-accumulation and fake development, collapsed yet again. The neoliberal promises of continuous development reached an end and we are all facing the results of this collapse, depending on the country in which we are living. The purpose of this article is to make a brief report of the latest repressive practices of the Greek state against the anarchist movement and Greek society in general as a result of this systemic crisis of capitalism.

Crisis and state repression

One of the so-called first world countries, Greece experienced in the last 30 years, between 1974 after the fall of the junta until the Olympic games of 2004, frantic capitalist development camouflaged by the social democratic façade of its centralized state. Without wanting to analyse the means and ways it was achieved, the Greek capitalist deception was also fully promoted in the middle of the previous decade; concerned with creating a society that was based on the lower middle class, who had partial access to over-accumulated fake wealth, by being allowed to obtain the proposed consumerist lifestyle of the capitalists – the whole package of the house in the suburb, two cars, two children, access to high education etc. The Greek society being hypnotized and ‘stoned’ by this capitalist lifestyle, seemed to be fully duped by its authoritarians and, as a result, social alienation became deeply established among the people. Competition, individualism and indifference were the basic means by which the elite gained leverage. In 2005, the reality of Greek society was really disappointing, and the anarchist movement, with some hundreds of comrades, was isolated.

The collapse of this hollow financial development took from the ruling class their greatest propaganda tool which was the promise of consumerist and individualistic prosperity given in the previous years. The first crucial point was on December of 2008, when state murderers (the police) executed the fifteen-year-old teenager, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, in cold blood in the centre of Athens. This bullet sent shock waves through the whole oppressed society, that had already tasted in the previous three years the social war that the capitalists and the state have declared on them by the continuous cut of the social wage.

During this period the anarchist movement had for the first time the chance to approach the social base and by being at the forefront of the revolutionary actions that took place attracted a lot of disillusioned people, especially youth. Since then there has been a period of four years in which the state had shown its real cruel face by passing through an endless stream of anti-social laws, in order to fast track a neoliberal transformation by privatizing the whole public sector and creating working conditions of slavery. As a result, they have turned what was some years ago apparently a capitalist paradise to a centre of financial and social exploitation for the local and north European capitalists.

As a response to this social pauperization a many people throughout Greece started questioning the current system in general and asking for a directly democratic and egalitarian society. A great number of groups were created organised along directly democratic lines and their actions were based in solidarity and social equality. The anarchist movement tried to support as much as possible these groups and their actions and tried to inspire as many people as possible to look critically at the previously dominant ideas of individualism and social competition in order to propagate a libertarian social attitude that could point towards a different society.

The financial surplus that would buy off the people, then, no longer existed and the state was failing to maintain control through propaganda. So instead its mask slipped and it began using all of its violent repression methods against all rebellious social spaces. It was more than obvious that from this stage on any form of resistance would be made illegal and repressed. The main receiver of the state's violent repression was of course the anarchist movement, as an example of what would happen to anyone that was willing to question the established oppressive system. The incidents of the massive state repression against the anarchist movement in Greece are innumerable.

Current developments

The social war in Greece is now at its peak and the once 'democratic' state has stopped pretending and been transformed into a totalitarian regime that has as its only purpose to establish the regime necessary in neoliberal conditions for the local and foreign capitalist to exploit in the maximum possible level the social wealth and the people of Greece. A full analysis of the repressive violent attacks of the state to the movement would probably need a lot of pages starting from the new established legislation that label terrorist any form of political action that the authoritarians don't like – even a political document that questions the capitalist structures can with the new legislation be considered as act of terrorism – to the countless attacks on squats and protests that have led to the imprisonment of hundreds comrades. Such an organised and massive attack towards a social movement hasn't been seen before in a 'democratic' state, let us mention that only in the last few months the state has attacked more than ten anarchist squats and dozens of comrades have been imprisoned.

The culmination of the state's organized attacks have been the shutdown of the three biggest counter information media of the anarchist movement, Athens Indymedia, Radio 98FM and Radio Entasi. These actions are the most illustrative example of the social war that is raging and because of that an extensive analysis of these actions should be made in order to reveal all the means and ways that the authoritarians are using through the state in order to smash any form of reaction.

Both the server of Athens Indymedia and the antennas of the radio stations were hosted at the National Technical University in Athens (NTUA). In previous years there have been attempts to sabotage them, by some right wing MP that were constantly raising questions in parliament about the location of the server and of the antennas and also by the university itself. For whole weekends the electricity was shut down inside across the university or even before some big protests so that there could be no effective coordination of the people through the use of Athens Indymedia and the radio stations. Until now, however, all these attempts were unsuccessful because of the asylum that existed in universities and Greek universities are autonomous institutions where the state cannot directly implement its policies.

Both the autonomy and asylum offered by the universities, however, are now in the process of being shut down, as the state repressive and neoliberal agenda wants to create universities in the standards of other capitalist economies where the universities are just an industry of financial research and nothing more. A new law about the universities was voted by the government last year that restricts the public and liberated form of the universities and pushes them towards the process of privatization. Nonetheless, because the reaction of the university students and teachers was on a massive scale and quite radical the current law so far has only been voted in

the parliament and is not fully implemented (in the sense that, for example, the asylum may not exist anymore but still in most of the cases the police are not allowed to enter the universities).

Under these very fragile and explosive social conditions the state was determined to implement its repression of the movement and shut down the alternative media. They want to show that from now on there won't be any free space of expression left, except from the main authoritarian propaganda of the mass media. On the other hand, the state realized the explosive nature of the situation and didn't want to escalate things either. Universities are a very delicate social issue in Greece and so here at least it wants to present itself as democratic. This goes back to 1973 when the last Greek junta had suppressed a huge university occupation with the use of the army and from then on, the universities became a symbol of resistance in society and any direct repressive action against them will be directly considered as very undemocratic. Because of that they had to use all of their legal mechanisms that would present their actions as legal and ethical as possible and so it would not take it upon themselves to actually shut down the server and the antennas.

A whole legal show has been concocted, in which all the needed ridiculous charges against the radio stations and Athens Indymedia were established. The Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission (E.E.T.T.) reported to the dean of NTUA on 18th March 2011 the operation and broadcast without permission of an antenna system with the name Radio 98FM inside the university, the university's first response was to appeal to the complaint of E.E.T.T. on 5th January 2012. The appeal was finally declined on 9th April 2013 and to the previous charges it was also added the interference of THE radio station of SKAI (a large radio and TV station that broadcasts state propaganda) from a second radio station inside the university with the name Radio Entasi. As a result the NTUA was asked to undertake the necessary steps in order to shut down the radio stations, otherwise the university would have to face a penalty that may be as much as 3,000,000 Euros.

As for the makeup of the legal accusations regarding Athens Indymedia, this story goes even more back in the past, as the university has been receiving charges from the prosecuting authorities regarding the existence of the Indymedia server inside the university for years. We are presenting some of the main accusations that were made against Athens Indymedia, just to show how ridiculous and dangerous their legal system is. Athens Indymedia is accused by the state of the forming of criminal organization, terrorist actions, explosions that may cause danger of human lives, creation and possession of explosive materials, destruction of private property, defamation and the ridiculous list goes on.

The university, in order to face this huge terrorist threat, came out with the following plan: it was decided that internet providing would be given to any student union only after the compilation of an application form and after that the application should be approved by the president of the corresponding department. This procedure had to be made to providing internet for any computer not already registered, and the implementation of the above process was gradual and the deadline for completion of the procedures ended 11th April 2013 (until the end of the deadline there hasn't been a single application filed by anyone in the NTUA). So on 11th April, after the state had taken all the proper legal steps in order to present their repressive actions as a matter of national defence against terrorists, proceeded through their stooge, dean of NTUA, Simos Simopoulos, to shutdown the above mentioned alternative media.

From the first moment the reflexes of the movement and all the people that were in solidarity with the anarchists were immediate, all the student unions of NTUA demanded that the dean

revoke his decisions and they denounced the censorship which the state and the dean imposed on Athens Indymedia and the anarchist radio stations. The next day, on 12th April 2013, a protest was called against the dean that took place in NTUA and was supported by a lot of people. Under the weight of the protests the dean literally hid himself by putting into command the deputy dean, who finally refused to comply. The actions of resistance were even more intensive the next week and on Monday, 15th April, the building of the dean was occupied by many comrades.

During the occupation the radio stations went on air again and just before Athens Indymedia would go on internet again, the same repressive mechanisms shut down the internet in the whole university. Still the state wanted to fight back and became even more repressive in order to show that any form of resistance will be smashed. On 24th April, during one more action of solidarity with Athens Indymedia and the anarchist radio stations, in which comrades put a huge banner against the state repression in front of the building of the dean, the state showed its eagerness to crack down on protest by taking 69 comrades to the central police department and finally arresting 6 of them. In this case, as well, the state made the same old justifications for its actions, repeated by the mass media that this protest – to stop the censorship of free speech and the alternative media – was a police operation against vicious terrorists who had brought down the Greek flag in front of the dean's building and raised the anarchist flag instead.

All the above mentioned incidents show the depth of the social war that is raging inside Greek society, which is a result of the continuous attempt of the authoritarians for domination and the maximum possible exploitation of the people. They set the base for the next capitalist era, in which all the previous social conquests that came as a result of the new deal and the capitalist promise of a fair society (at least in the countries of the first-world) are negated. Within these social transformations a harsh social repression is essential for the establishment of new social attitudes that imply a society that endures and passively accepts all new exploitative practices.

These examples of repression may seem a bit distant from the social reality of the UK (although in fact the forms of control here are already very well imposed and established in my view), but it is incredibly important to be aware of what's happening elsewhere. We need to show our solidarity with comrades in every corner of the planet, where they are facing the system's repression and oppression, but don't be fooled that this does not concern you. Capitalism is, after all, a globalized system of exploitation, in which power is generated at both local and international level and repression of working class people in one place is bad news for working class people everywhere. People here need to start being more concerned about these developments, to analyze them and learn from them

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