

Interview with TPTG: Class struggles in Greece

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Interview with Greek anti-authoritarian communist collective TPTG about crisis of capitalism and its reflections on Greece and class struggle of proletariat against austerity measures. Interview was made before elections in Greece, but we discuss Left and their actions. Also, first two answers are taken from their article *Burdened with Debt Reloaded*.

In 2010 you've published an article *Burdened with Debt* which you have presented in summer camp. In this article you've wrote about the way in which the crisis of capitalism is reflected in Greece, i.e. the "debt crisis" and "shock therapy" of the PASOK government in cooperation with the EU and the IMF, and you have also examined possibilities of class struggle in what you have called "*the harshest class attack since the end of the 2nd world war called "austerity measures"*. Recently, on April 12th, you published a supplement article entitled *Burdened with Debt Reloaded*. Can you briefly introduce us with the analysis of the situation in Greece?

In our first articles we have stated that the aggravation of the protracted capitalist reproduction crisis had been postponed by a certain politics of money that had led to a relative autonomisation of finance capital and a closer interaction between exporters of capital/lenders of money and debtors with increasing private or public debts (on the level of the EU this was expressed as a hierarchical interaction between the "core" nation-states and the "peripheral" ones). With the bursting of the real estate bubble in the US into a global financial crisis in 2008 there were additional public debts due to socializing of capitalist losses and bailing out banks. In Greece, the regime of accumulation of the '90s and 2000's based on the increase of fixed capital investment and productivity of labour, a dual labour market and high public and private spending made possible by the low real interest rates in the Eurozone "periphery" (due to the higher inflation rates compared to the ones in the "core") and the corresponding influx of capitals from the surpluses of the EU "core"—a regime that had started showing signs of decline since the mid 2000's due to the fall in the rate of exploitation—collapsed completely with the advent of the crisis.

The initial austerity measures developed into a full blown shock policy of devaluation of capital, which has deepened the recession and increased public debt. A main ingredient of the politics

of devaluation of capital is the depreciation of labour power which aims at the weakening of the power of the working class by establishing permanent austerity and disciplining mechanisms, and by the creation of a large reserve army. Furthermore, this depreciation of labour power is facilitated by the institutional abolition of collective bargaining agreements, a process which, to a great extent, undermines the very function of the labour power representation mechanisms. The general politics of devaluation, with its bank recapitalization measures, the elimination or expropriation of that portion of the total-social capital (small and medium-scale enterprises) that is unable to valorise surplus capital, the depreciation of promissory notes and the fall in consumption and investments, aims at the centralization of capital, the reproduction of so-called primitive accumulation and the overcoming of the separation between the different moments in the reproduction of the capitalist relationship that existed before the crisis. In the midst of a capital devaluation process, there are nevertheless certain investment plans especially in the energy sector (solar power, oil and hydrocarbons) and a long list of imminent privatisations of state services and state controlled companies, which, however, in an environment of deep recession and lack of state investments, seem very uncertain.

As an illustration of what we said above, here are the most recent data we have gathered.

In 2010–2011, GDP (in 2000 fixed prices) has decreased by 10% (overall recession for 2008–2011 is 16,3%). Total consumption has fallen by 12.6% (-10.7% for private consumption and -14.5% for public consumption). Gross fixed capital investment has decreased by 17.9%.

The exports of goods and services have increased by 14.5% in 2010–2011. This is due to the recovery of international trade, which is the increase of external demand in all countries. So, if it is put in its international context, Greece's market performance of exports of goods and services in 2010–2011 is -1% compared to 2009, which is the worst export performance in the last 20 years. Exports correspond only to the 1/5 of GDP.

In the second quarter of 2011, employment has decreased by 6.1% and unemployment has increased by 36.5% compared with the second quarter in 2010. The rate of unemployment had reached 20.9% last November or, in other words, more than one million people. Particularly affected are women from 15 to 34 years old whose unemployment percentage is 32% and young people (15–24 years) in general whose percentage is 48%. GSEE estimates that the unemployment rate will run into 26% in 2012. This percentage of unemployment is comparable only to the one in the early '60s when hundreds of thousands of Greeks emigrated to central Europe, North America and Australia. Note that the 2012 estimates do not count in the forthcoming dismissals in the public sector: 15,000 state workers will be dismissed this year and 150,000 in total by 2015. The only sector where employment is increasing is the police. During 2010–2011 the unit labor cost decreased only by 1.2%. This happened because while average nominal wage in the private sector decreased by 4.5%, productivity of labour also decreased by 3.3%.

Already 1 in 4 commercial enterprises has closed down and their confederation estimates that by the summer 2012 38% of them will have closed down. During 2010–11 68.000 small and medium-scale enterprises have closed down (Jan-Sep 2011: 67.000 job losses) while estimates for 2012 seem gloomy too: 60.000 more enterprises are to close down resulting in 100.000 job losses. It is important to note down that small and medium size enterprises in Greece are the true backbone of both the Greek economy and society, accounting for 99.9% of all capitalist enterprises, their share in total employment being 85.6% –without taking into account the “black” labor force– compared to 66.9% in EU and they count for 72% of value-added production compared to 58.4 % in the EU according to 2011 statistics.

Without going into details, since the cuts vary according to the age of the pensioners, the amount of the pension and the pension fund one belongs to, due to the new measures pensions will be cut by 10 to 20%, retirement compensation by 30% while health care has deteriorated and social benefits to disabled people have been cut too.

In 2010–2011, wages in the public sector had been cut by 23%. With the introduction of the new wage scale in this sector in November 2011, the wages have been cut by an additional 20% in average. Before the new round of austerity measures, the real wages in the private sector had been cut by 8%. Now the basic pay is cut by 22% and for those under 25 by 32%. This means that the basic pay is reduced to 480 euros or 400 euros for those under 25. The unemployment benefit is reduced to 350 euros (note that in Greece you can't get this benefit, which is the same for every unemployed, for more than one year and you are entitled to get it only if you have worked for two consecutive years full-time before your dismissal).

In 2011 the government budget deficit has increased in absolute terms by 1.3% in comparison with 2010. The state revenues have decreased by 1.7% while the state expenses have increased by 2.8% in the same period. The decrease of state revenues is due to: a) the reduction of average wages, pensions and employment and, therefore, the reduction of the associated individual income taxes, b) the decline in the profitability of the capitalist enterprises which combined with the reduction of the profit tax rate by 1% in 2011 led to a significant reduction of the tax on profits (which will be decreased from 24% to 20% in 2012, see below), c) the lower than expected increase of revenues from indirect taxes (VAT, taxes on oil, alcohol and tobacco), despite the big increase of the tax rates, because of the reduction in consumption, d) the big increase of tax rebates instead of their initially planned decrease due to the failure of the new relevant tax regulations. The main reason behind the increase of the expenses has been the increased debt service: interest payments rose by 23.6% in comparison to 2010. On the other hand the so called "primary expenditures" have been decreased only by 1.3% in spite of the deep cuts of the wages in the public sector. This is due to the increase of the expenditure for social security, social care and social protection by 12.8%. This increase is the result of a) the increased subsidies to the pension funds which are on the verge of disaster due to the big reduction of the social security contributions caused by the big rise of unemployment, the reduction of average wages and the wide extension of part time labour contracts and b) the increased expenditure for unemployment benefits caused also by the rise of unemployment. Further, military expenditure declined by 60% while expenditure related to the "Public Investments Program" declined by 21.8%. According to EUROSTAT, the ratio of Greek government debt to GDP has risen dramatically from 113% in 2008 to 129% in 2009, to 145% in 2010 and reached 165,3% by 2011. According to the European Committee, this ratio will be decreased to 161,4% by 2012 due to the PSI implementation, before rising again to 165,3% in 2013. Then, according to EC's "wishful thinking", it will start to decline slowly, as the Greek GDP will be increasing to reach a bit less than 120% in 2020, namely, where it was in 2009 when the fiscal terrorism strategy was adopted for the "salvation" of the country!

In 2010 the Greek proletariat was the seventh poorest one in the EU in relative terms, with 27.7% of the population living in a household with a disposable income below the "poverty threshold" (60% of the median national disposable income). It is sure that this figure has risen since then and that a higher proportion of the proletariat is below "the poverty threshold". The number of homeless people is approximately 20,000 (11,000 in Athens alone) having increased in the last two years by 20–25%. Most of the new cases of Greek homeless people are not related to drug addiction or mental illness as was mostly the case before 2008 but to long-term unemployment

and/or house foreclosures. Suicides (both attempted and accomplished) have increased from 507 in 2009 to 622 in 2010 (+22,5%) before getting stabilized in 2011 (598 until December 2011, -3.9%). By comparing those numbers to the Greek average suicide rate (3.5 per 100,000 citizens –one of the lowest in Europe), then the increase gets much higher: +31,4% in 2009, +61,4% in 2010 and +55,7% in 2011. Hundreds of people witnessed a 77-year old pensioner shooting himself at Syntagma Sq. At his suicide note he wrote that he did not want to end up searching for his food in the trash bins. The news of this tragic event caused widespread anger. The same afternoon a few thousands of people gathered at Syntagma Sq. As a result, small scale clashes occurred with the riot police at the square and nearby streets. There is no official survey of the state of the medical system in Greece for the years 2010–2011. Some of the main changes we have experienced: since the beginning of this year, four major Health and Insurance Funds (those for civil servants/state workers, private sector workers, self-employed –both workers and small bosses– and farmers/peasants) have been unified into one, the National Organization for Healthcare Provision (EOPPY) which covers 9.5 million people. According to the regulations of this new fund, the number of doctors who are in contract with it is just 5000, which means 1 doctor for 2000 insured patients. Moreover, the maximum number of patients who are allowed to visit a doctor for free is 50 during a week and 200 during a month. After these numbers have been reached, the next patients should pay. Besides, the state compensation to doctors has fallen from 20 to 6.5 euros per visit, which is certain to become an additional factor for the deterioration of medical care –unless one can afford to pay more.

There is a growing tendency of emigration among both skilled and unskilled workers. The state seems to favour such a development for reasons of weakening forthcoming class struggles, that's why it looks forward a bilateral agreement with Australia and New Zealand similar to the one it has already made with Canada. Many immigrants from Eastern Europe (Albania, Poland, Romania) working during the past years at the constructions sector, as well as many Kurds are leaving the country since they can't find a job any more. At the same time the police is persecuting street vendors from Africa and Asia under the pretext of eliminating "illegal trade" and the centres of the cities are kept under constant surveillance, while the presence of riot cops and police squads in areas where marginalized proletarians hang around is more than evident. Illegal immigration is crudely related to increased criminality rates and threats for the public health according to the overwhelming media propaganda that diverts the public discourse agenda, imposing the immigrant figure as the convenient scapegoat for all the suffering currently experienced by the Greek population. At the same time, the police doesn't prevent fascist gangs and thugs from attacking immigrants. A new law has been introduced by the government as part of the new agreement with the troika, within the next three months all "illegal" immigrants employed at the agricultural sector or as nurses, maids and cleaners must present with their employers at the police in order to register themselves. Within six months after his/her "registration" the immigrant must return to his/her country of origin and only in one month after his/her deportation from Greece, his/her employer can apply in order to get a one year permit for his employee.

The undermining of the function of the unions is also shown by the recent closing of the Workers' Housing Organisation (OEK) and of the Workers' Social Fund (OEE) both supervised by the Ministry of Labour, as part of downsizing the public sector in observance of the terms set by Greece's creditors. These two organisations were funded by workers' and bosses' contributions, which were recently abolished (the so-called 'decrease of the non-wage cost') so that the government could find an extra 300 million to finalize the deal of the new bailout package with troika.

As OEK was in charge of state-subsidized housing for the poor and large families, it was estimated to have around 1 billion euros of available capital for the development of housing units across Greece. However, the closing of the Workers' Social Fund (OEE) has another effect, one on unions. Founded in 1931 by the state, OEE's role was to manipulate and control unionism, as it would support financially and house those unions whose 'objectives and activities were not against the Law', as its founding law dictated. The unions have reached a point where this inability of theirs has finally undermined their very existence.

Will Greece “crash” Eurozone? How would fall of Eurozone affect class struggle in Greece and in the rest of Europe? How would it affect Greek economy and crisis development?

Whether this peculiarly irrational condition of “*unemployed capital at one pole and unemployed worker population at the other*” (Marx) will be resolved in the future through a controlled recession that will lead to a rise of the competitiveness of the Greek economy inside a new European cycle of accumulation or whether the increasing contradictions due to protracted politics of devaluation will lead to chaotic development and the rupture of the Eurozone, we do not know. We can't tell what the extent and the forms of the centralization of capital will be. While we are still in the midst of a devaluation process through “debt crisis”, it is too early to say what the form and content of a future regime of accumulation will be –if there is going to be one– fuelled by a devalued labour power and how much stable it will be. This process has led to a competition among the capitalist “hostile brothers” where, both at the level of relations between nation-states and on the national terrain, the strongest and the most cunning “*tries to reduce his own share [to loss] to a minimum and to shove it off upon another*” (Marx). It has also led to the rise of nationalism inside the working class, an individualist struggle to preserve one's job, an export of labour power (especially its skilled part) and a rust out of the unemployed labour power.

How do you comment new Greek “technical government” and their policies? How much will their reforms and actions undermine working class struggle? There were new union demonstrations in Athens which clashed with police, so it looks like Greek working class doesn't accept them. Also, there's interesting article by Mark Ames showing that new Greek Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks Makis Voridis lead student fascist group “Student Alternative” in 1985. What's army's position? Could another junta take power to protect capital?

The creation of the new Greek “technical government” with a technocrat as a prime minister has been the expression of the weakness of the previous PASOK government to implement the reforms stipulated by the Structural Adjustment Program. It was actually the reaction of the state to the legitimacy crisis of the former government and the inability of the political system as a whole to manage recent social upheaval and class struggles effectively. The 48-hour strike of 19–20 October and the widespread violent protests during the parades for the national holiday of October 28th forced the prime minister, first to try the trick of the referendum and then, after the pressures from his party and the EU, to opt for the creation of the “national unity government” with the participation of LAOS, a populist right-wing party, and New Democracy, the centre-right main opposition party. The reforms and measures announced by the new prime-minister are actually a continuation of the politics of the previous government, namely a continuation and deepening of the fiscal terrorism. However, till now the new government had not introduced any

new measures and tried to be more “flexible” on the implementation of the tax on the properties introduced by the previous government.

It is difficult to predict the response of the working class. For the time being at least, as a ‘national unity’ government led by a technocrat, who is supposedly not “corrupt” like the politicians, it serves as a reserve and seems to be tolerated. However, weak as it is with the different factions within it trying to avoid assuming the political responsibilities and consequences of the austerity measures, it is difficult to stay in power as long as it needs to. Besides, since it is about to impose a new wave of devastating reforms, its ability to postpone the explosion of social anger is rather limited.

Discussions about a possible military coup are not new. See for example this article, dated September, 19, which mentions a report from the CIA in June.

Such discussions became vivid again when the former government decided a sudden change in top roles of the military to exert its party rule and a tighter control of the staff of the army in the face of mounting resistance from the workers and its inability to find an equilibrium among the varying aims of different fractions of the Greek capital. But one of the basic reasons was the need to ensure that those in high rank would be in total agreement with the extended cuts in the army (the abolition of some Army Corps, mainly in northern Greece), since the previous chief of the army had disagreements on the extent of the cuts. The new officers are experienced and have been heavily involved in various NATO-Euroarmy interventions and most importantly are younger and chosen precisely for their obedience to the government.

So, just before the PASOK government gave way to the new “national unity” government, they selected their own party loyalists. Also, a magazine revealed recently that the dismissal of the leadership of the Greek armed forces had to do with their denial to dispose personnel of the army for the repression of the strikes (in particular for the 48-hour strike of 19 and 20 October).

So, in a situation of generalized crisis we cannot exclude the possibility that the army will be called to be in charge of possible repressive operations against revolting crowds. According to some reports, the artillery commander of a town near Athens called the staff to be in fighting trim since the country is on the brink of collapse and the army may be ordered to get to the streets.

However, it is difficult for the army to play an autonomous role in the political life of Greece and therefore it is highly improbable that the leadership of the army could take the initiative to be in power in order to save capitalism. Such an initiative could also be very embarrassing for the EU since a country “run” by the military should be excluded by the EU. It is more probable that the Greek government could use the army in case protests expand and the situation becomes unmanageable for the police.

Referendum which was proposed by PASOK didn’t happen because of EU’s directives. Was there some actual alternative to present situation on that referendum or was it just about picking between lesser evil in capital management? What do Greeks think of European Union and its imperialism?

The proposal for the supposed referendum on the new EU debt plan was just a trick of the previous government (and Papandreou personally in fact) as it was facing an increasingly rapid delegitimization and was unable to enforce the new debt treaty. So, their solution was to impose a new “national unity” government with some members from the New Democracy party and the ultra-right LAOS. The medium to do so was the proposal of the notorious “referendum” which was used as a blackmail from Papandreou against mainly the New Democracy party in order

to make them accept to take part in the coalition government. There was no possibility for such a referendum to take place since it could jeopardize the continuation of the fiscal terrorism being imposed for two years now, something that the PASOK government had no intention to do. Besides, the melodramatic way it was proposed proved very instrumental into terrorizing the Greek population in general so as to make them regard the new government as a “solution”. It was only certain parts of the Left that considered the referendum as a viable and possible option in their illusions that they would be thus granted the power from the people.

Populist nationalism is dominant within the part of the Greek proletariat which participates in the struggles. This ideology is mainly promoted by the left political parties and forces that greatly influence the discourse and activity within the struggles. Even for a lot of proletarians or petite-bourgeois hard hit by the crisis who are not affiliated with political parties, national identity appears as a last imaginary refuge when everything else is rapidly crumbling. Behind the slogans against the “foreign, sell out government” or for the “Salvation of the country”, “National sovereignty” and a “New Constitution” lies a deep feeling of fear and alienation to which the “national community” appears as a magical unifying solution. Class interests are often expressed in nationalist terms producing a confused and explosive political cocktail.

The ideology of “national unity” has been also promoted and utilized by the Greek capitalist state itself. The partners within the EU are portrayed as commanders and rivals; the unified European village whose inhabitants live harmoniously and co-decide democratically falls apart while a matter of utmost importance, the defence of the nation –this perennial deception– comes to the fore. The most conservative part of the Greek proletariat which is not prepared to reverse its devaluation through class struggle and supports the neoliberal political program puts its hopes for a future increase of the value of its own labour power in the increase of the competitiveness of the Greek economy.

In both cases, the European Union, and especially Germany as its apparent leader, is perceived as an alien power which imposes the austerity measures and policies in order to secure its interests and the full repayment of the debt owed by the Greek state. Another widespread idea is that the powerful countries in the EU have their eyes on the cheap acquisition of Greek national resources and constant capital. The government is perceived as a servant of foreign interests having lost sovereignty due to the fiscal obligations of the Greek state. The main difference between the left and the neoliberal political propaganda lies in the methodology to regain “national sovereignty”. In the neoliberal case this will be achieved through the successful imposition of the austerity program. In the case of the leftists, this will be achieved through a nationally independent, social-democratic path for the “development of the country”, i.e. for capitalist development.

Of course, there are minoritarian radical tendencies within the proletariat in Greece who grasp the true nature of the austerity program, i.e. that it is a harsh class attack against the proletariat aiming at weathering the crisis through the recovery of the profitability of Greek capital which entails the destruction of its unproductive parts (such as small family enterprises, which have massively closed down). The class conscious parts of the proletariat realize that this attack is the specific form taken by the collective capitalist strategy within the European Union in Greece. The adoption of the common currency was the previous historical form of the collective capitalist strategy within the EU. The austerity programs which are implemented or will be implemented in the near future all around the EU and their consolidation with the so-called European Fiscal Union, in order to manage the European sovereign debt crisis and to save the common currency,

constitute the current form of the collective capitalist strategy which is followed for the benefit of all the national capitals and of all the ruling classes within the European Union with all the contradictions, frictions and serious social/political turbulences that they necessarily entail.

Greece is for past couple of years “epicenter” of World’s class struggle. What kind of impact did recent clash between Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the rest of the movement left on movement? Did that manage to weaken movement’s cohesion?

First of all we would like to comment on the characterization “epicenter” of World’s class struggle. Despite the fact that proletarian activity is continuous and vivid and it creates real obstacles for the ongoing restructuring of class relations, this activity remains “weak”. Struggles are still fragmented, defensive, most of them controlled by unions and there is an almost total lack of autonomous proletarian action and of more radical contents of struggle going beyond the union demands. The response of the greater part of the working class is imbued by either an individualist mentality or by a sectional identity which reproduces the separations within the class, or by a nationalist-populist mentality blaming “corruption” of the politicians.

However, we recognize that the class struggle in Greece has a direct and indirect impact on the class struggle on a broader level, especially in Europe, since it is clear that similar “adjustment/austerity” programs have already begun to be implemented in other European countries as well.

The ‘sovereign debt crisis’ attack unsurprisingly found its immediate target at the public sector. Therefore, the workers at this sector were the first who responded against the wage cuts, the huge slashes in public spending, the dismantling of services and the dissolution of a vast amount of state entities. Apart from strikes and demos which escalated last October, a wave of sit-in protests at town halls, ministries and public service offices by civil servants in Athens and around the country marked an unusual upgrading of struggle for this particular sector. Workers sealed off the entrance to the social security informatics directorate, as well as the entrance to the housing, interior and development ministries and to the pensions directorate of the General State Accounts Office. These militant practices, which blocked at least temporarily the ‘labour reserve’ plans of the government (whereby 30,000 civil servants were supposed effectively to lose their jobs within months) signalled the awakening of the majority of the chronically lethargic civil servants whose very existence, according to the state propaganda, now constitutes the main ‘structural problem’ of the country.

Capitalist crisis proves to be particularly unhealthy for proletarians as the severe cuts in all kinds of health services show: there were about 40% cuts in hospital budgets, understaffing, reported occasional shortage of medical supplies, merges or even closures of hospitals as well as mental institutions and rehabilitation centres. Health workers have responded by continuous strikes or even occupations of the Health Ministry with the last one having lasted for 15 days. An interesting struggle took place in the General Hospital of Kilkis, a town in northern Greece, for some weeks. The general assembly of all health workers (doctors included) decided to occupy the premises and started the retention of work, serving only emergencies until the complete payment for the hours worked, and the rise of their income to the levels it was before the arrival of the troika (EU-ECB-IMF), as they say. They also provided free healthcare declaring that the long-lasting problems of the National Health System (ESY) in the country cannot be solved through limited claims of the health services sector and thus they placed their special interests inside a general framework of political and economic demands against the brutal capitalist attack asking for solidarity from everybody. Though the occupation is over, the unpaid health workers continue the retention of work.

Two milk factories in Attiki and Larissa correspondingly were the terrain of some victories: after just one-day strike in Agno milk factory against lay offs and clashes with the riot cops, the workers got back to their jobs. In Larissa the strike made the bosses revoke both the lay offs and the wage cuts. In a pharmaceutical factory in Northern Attiki the 330 workers' struggle was focused on demanding wages due (they had not been paid for months) and rejecting the imposition of intermittent work (once a week). There were also clashes with the riot police when the bosses tried to remove commodities of thousands euros value out of the factory. The 400 steel workers' strike at Elliniki Chalivourgia (over 150 strike days) in West Attiki started as a response to 50 lay offs after the bosses' blackmail to change the labour contract (5 hours a day for a 50% wage cut) had been rejected.

'Communist' bosses have been hit by the recession, too. Since December 2010 the administration of the KKE-owned 902 FM radio station /902 TV had started firing non-party member workers without previous notice. What's worse, when some workers started organizing against the firings, they faced the party's divide-and-rule tactics pitting them against the party members.

The use of the steelworkers' strike as a tool for promoting the stalinist party's general political line, does leave room for some opportunistic manoeuvre though, as the recent (17/2) warm welcome to the neo-nazi Golden Dawn 'solidarity delegates' in the factory by the head of the union showed. Whether the steelworkers are heading for a double defeat –both by the bosses and the stalinists who manipulate a workers' struggle subordinating it to their political games– or not is a bet that a lot would not like to make...

Struggles over wages due are quite often the case in the tertiary sector, too. Hotel workers were on strike in Northern Greece demanding wages due for months and mainly young and unemployed people who took part in the National Census managed to get their wages after a 6-month delay and after selforganized mobilizations (since there was no union for them).

Let's move to the clash between KKE-PAME and other demonstrators during the general strike on October 20, 2011. To start with, we will make some clarifications on that day's event. KKE members were stationed in military formation in the area around the parliament, armed with helmets and sticks, facing the demonstrators with the riot squads behind them, preventing anyone from approaching, even asking for reporters' identities and attacking fiercely later those in the crowd who defied their cordons. As the clashes started, the riot squads came for their protection attacking people with chemicals and flash-bang grenades evacuating the area.

It was revealed later that the Stalinists had made an agreement with the police so as to be allowed to police the demo themselves. According to our information, similar agreements were made between the KKE and other left parties' or groupuscules' unionists so that each was allotted a special place near the parliament accepting KKE's hegemony. They later supported fully KKE in its denunciation of the "anarcho-fascists", "parastatals" etc. These characterizations referred to all those who were not part of the deal, not willing to accept it and tried to break their cordons. We must mention that the majority of the people involved in the clash with the Stalinists were anti-authoritarians and anarchists.

As far as the impact of that clash is considered we can give some preliminary thoughts:

1. KKE-PAME made a demonstration of power on the level of "street politics". Until then KKE's demonstrations and actions had been separate from the rest of the mobilizations. The message of this demonstration had a twofold meaning. It showed in a practical way that apart from the police, proletarians also have to deal with the Stalinist police. Taking

into account that many people regarded the event as a conflict “among demonstrators”, the action of KKE “injected” people with fear. At the same time, KKE proved its capacity to impose “Law and Order” as a parliamentary political force.

2. KKE managed to create borderlines between those who condemn the “murderous attacks made by parastatal hooded people” against its forces and those who didn’t accept KKE’s distorted version of the events. These borderlines appeared in local assemblies and in base unions.
3. We believe that KKE and the Left in general will play a key-role for the capitalist domination especially if the major political forces (PASOK and New Democracy) will not manage to prevail on the central political scene in the future.
4. Last but not least, KKE’s move could be interpreted as the first act of a new policing doctrine which aims to pacify demonstrations and marginalize proletarian violence through the creation and reinforcement of divisions between “violent” and “non-violent” demonstrators. Divisions that were fading out during previous mobilizations. This new policing doctrine is realized through the cooperation of the Police and Party/Unionist mechanisms.

What can you tell us about popular assemblies? How did they appear? Do workers support them? Are they heavily influenced by political parties’ activists? Are there some kinds of workplace assemblies or are they just limited to main squares?

The first “popular assemblies” appeared during the uprising in December 2008. In many cases they were connected to the occupation of public buildings like Town Halls. The occupants organized meetings with local people trying to broaden the revolt organizing local actions, always connected to the revolt. In all these actions, the common characteristic was an attempt to “open up” the rebellion towards the neighbourhoods. These assemblies were understood as “neighbourhood assemblies of struggle” or “people’s assemblies”, as they were called. In most cases, there appeared distinct tendencies inside this social “opening”, particularly as the rebellion was simmering down. One tendency wanted to organize a community of struggle broadening the issues of the rebellion, another one preferred a kind of activity more orientated towards dealing with local matters on a steady basis. However, gradually these assemblies began to weaken and most of them stopped or continued to exist but with very few people.

The people who participated in these assemblies were mostly anarchists/anti-authoritarians, leftists but also many people from the neighborhoods (workers, unemployed, students or even owners of small shops) who were not politicized. At the very beginning most of the people participated as insurgents, but as the uprising weakened the old identities returned: the identity of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian, the leftist or even the “resident” who wants to deal only with the local issues of the neighbourhood.

The next dynamic resurgence of the “popular assemblies” took place in May 2011 influenced by the “indignados” movement in Spain and the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.

The movement of the assemblies in the squares started completely unexpectedly on the 25th of May 2011 in Athens. From the very first day the protesters occupied Syntagma square, which is in the center of Athens and the place where the daily general assembly took place with the participation of hundreds or even thousands of people. The initial call was a declaration of independence and separation from political parties, representation and ideologies. It also declared

the will to protest peacefully against the austerity measures, the state management of the debt crisis and “all those who led us here”. Furthermore, a main slogan was the call for a “real democracy”. The slogan of “real democracy” was quickly replaced after a couple of days by the slogan of “direct democracy”. The initial effort of the organizers to set a body of specific democratic rules for the assembly was rejected by the participants. However, certain regulations were established after some days concerning the time-limit of the speeches (90 sec), the way that someone can propose a subject for the discussion (in written form, two hours before the beginning of the assembly) and the way that speakers are being chosen (through a lottery). We should also mention that around the core of the general assembly there were always plenty of discussions, events or even confrontations among the participants.

The leftists and especially those coming from SYRIZA (Coalition of Radical Left) got quickly involved in the Syntagma assembly and took over important positions in the groups that were formed in order to run the occupation of Syntagma square, and, more specifically, in the group for “secretarial support” and the one responsible for “communication”. These two groups were the most important ones because they organized the agenda of the assemblies as well as the flow of the discussion. It must be noted that these people did not openly declare their political allegiance and appeared as “individuals”. However, these politicians were unable to completely manipulate such a volatile and heterogeneous assembly since the delegitimization of the political parties was prevalent.

As far as the class composition of the assembly is concerned, most of the people that participated were proletarians (unemployed workers, public sector workers, university students, workers from the private sector, etc.) and more oriented to the democratic left (patriotic, antifascist, anti-imperialist).

The assembly of the Syntagma square lasted for more than two months on a daily basis. During that time, many decisions involving the organization of direct actions have been taken. Nevertheless, in the end very few people really participated in them. It seems that the direct democratic process of just voting for or against a specific proposal in such a massive assembly tends to reproduce passivity and the role of the individualized spectator/voter. This passivity and individualization of a significant part of the people was transcended on the days of the general strikes (15/6, 28/6, 29/6 2011) when the need to struggle against the attempts of the state to disband the demonstration and to reoccupy Syntagma square not only led practically to the participation of thousands of people in the clashes with the police but also led to the expression of real solidarity among the demonstrators.

At the end of July 2011 the cops cleared the square. After that, all the attempts that were made in order to revive the general assembly, but without re-occupying the square, failed. One of the reasons is that the reappropriation of the space, provided by the occupation, was really important for the existence of the assembly, not only in terms of protection against the cops but also as a precondition for the creation of a proletarian public sphere, part of which was the daily general assembly.

During the occupation of Syntagma square a lot of local assemblies were formed at various neighbourhoods not only in Athens but at several places all over Greece. Their characteristics were more or less the same with those of the assembly at Syntagma square but in a smaller scale. A lot of these assemblies still exist but the participation is small apart from a few exceptions. They focus mainly on local issues but they also organize activities related to the refusal of payment of a new property tax which is incorporated in the electricity bill. Because of the latter, the

participants are not only politicized (anarchists/anti-authoritarians and leftists) but also people from the neighbourhoods who can't afford to pay or don't want to pay this new tax.

As far as the workplaces are concerned, there are no assemblies outside the union apparatuses.

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