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Interview made by Soccorso Rosso Internazionale [International Red Aid]

Kostas Gournas

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This is an interview that S.R.I. made with Kostas Gournas, a comrade of Revolutionary Struggle locked up in the prison of Koridallou, Athens:

1) What can you tell us about the current situation in Greece?

Greece is experiencing the biggest crisis in times of peace, a crisis composed of multiple aspects. The turmoil that has been unfolding in the country for 5 and a half years is something that one would expect only in times of war. The global financial crisis of 2008 drove Greece to the frontline of the debt crisis in Europe and led to the adoption of a selective insolvency model in order to enforce extreme austerity measures in the Eurozone. In no other country has 'shock treatment' of these proportions been imposed in such a short time, and this treatment has produced disastrous effects on society, even worse than those brought about in Latin America during the first experiments of the neoliberal school. Austerity measures have devastated the country's econ-

omy, destroyed 25% of its gross national product, created about 2 million unemployed and forced the majority of the population into a life below the level of survival. Greek society is suffering a double form of insolvency. The financial one, the huge fiscal deficit of the government-inflated state bonds differentials to 10 years, and the Greek state was unable to cover the debt. The Troika (IMF, EU and EIT)'s diktats on the control of the economy, not only that of the country, made the debt grow to a point of unsustainability. Through a process of debt restructuring (Private Sector Involvement), the exposure of foreign banks was substituted by Greek bonds, whose costs were subsequently inflicted on those who had incurred mortgages via transnational institutes such as the European Financial Stability Fund and the European Stability Mechanism, that is to say State-savings funds. The other form of insolvency is political. By the second half of 2008 the political system of the country was giving signs of collapse. The two-party system that had governed the country for 35 years was nearing the end of its life cycle. The plundering of social wealth by the Greek economic elites strictly linked to political power through totally corrupt functionaries, led the credibility of the ruling class to its lowest point. After the elections in 2012, for the first time a majority government failed to emerge and traditional powers remained in charge even if they had lost a high percentage of their electorate. At the same time both the institutional left and the nazi extreme right-wing party Golden Dawn gained votes. The government that emerged from the 2012 elections had its majority force in the right-wing party New Democracy. Subjected to the Troika's diktats, which have been increasingly contributing to the destruction of the country, the government introduced heavy right-wing measures and a ferocious attack on social struggles, workers and the political groups that resisted the neo-liberal assault. The government's programme aimed at securing a smooth realization of the Memorandum agreement while relying on violent repression and terrorism so as to maintain an extreme right-wing profile, destabilize the monopoly of the

nazi party, thus distracting its voters, and push those who oppose power on the left (SYRIZA) to adopt more conservative policies. In the last six months, as Greece chaired the EU Committee, great emphasis was given to the elections of 18th May and 25th May. The government was forced to take a step back and temporarily abandon its rhetorical and right-wing initiatives against political prisoners; this happened when its direct links with the nazi party became obvious. So the government concentrated on the promotion of the improvement of the economy, for which it intended to take merit. Through a coordinated electoral strategy, the EU boasted about the positive impact of the programmes imposed on Greece and issued annual bonds covered by the market. This development aimed at making the government appear as the only reliable option for the Greek people. As one of the effects of the crisis is the psychological breakdown of society, a state of stagnation is gaining ground. Desperation and pessimism have cut down all possibilities of a political and social move from below. The undergoing profound transformations produced a particular 'limbo situation'. Any hope of a leftist regime being able to change things is bound to disappear before time, and this is now acknowledged by all. The part of society that is hoping for a leftist government only wants to avoid the worst rather than improve the quality of their lives. In the meantime the extreme right seems to be becoming significantly stronger, even if the leaders of the nazi party are being persecuted by the government, it once again demonstrates how historically society takes a conservative turn in times of crisis. The wider radical movement seems to be incapable of understanding the depth of the crisis and the social turmoil surrounding it. Having lost important traditional instruments of struggle owing to repression, it is trying to discover its political identity and find its position in this time of transformation. It's a time when we have to rediscover everything from the beginning and devise new instruments of struggle, which along with the old ones will help overturn the social relations that are unfavourable to us.

2) *What's the wider context of the 'Guantanamo' project?*

The bill for the introduction of maximum security prisons and the exacerbation of prison conditions is part of the state of emergency, which was imposed on society through the Troika's control. The constant effort by the State of creating a situation of exception against political prisoners must be seen in this context, exactly according to the government extreme right policies. At the heart of the bill is the extermination of political prisoners to be carried out as soon as urban guerrilla war starts again. There was an attempt to impose the same situation in 2002, following the arrest of members of the '17th November' group, and also after that, at the end of the trial against the militants of the group, when the latter were transferred to a special unit of solitary confinement. The measure was implemented for several months and lifted after hunger strike protests and solidarity from the movement. No social consensus would have legitimized this programme ten years ago. Greece had no space for 'white cells'. The huge wave of protests against their adoption was very important, and it did stop it with militant actions.

3) *This is not the first attempt at imposing maximum security prisons; why didn't they manage to do it the first time?*

The struggle against the prison reform bill was first promoted by political prisoners with the participation of other prisoners in many jails of the country over the last two months. From the announcement of the bill to the present time, when the legislative process slowed down owing to the elections, a sort of trench warfare started off in anticipation of what could follow. Certainly we'll need a decisive and long campaign made by prisoners and solidarity groups in order to prevent the enforcement of the bill, which is a strategic choice of the government.

4) *Resistance is starting off... what are the plans in this respect?*

Greece has a long and important tradition concerning armed struggle. This phenomenon continues to animate those who resist in the European continent and has much to do with the social sup-

port it can enjoy. On the one hand there are reasons that produce expressions of resistance, especially in the current time of crisis; on the other there's no sign of the Greek people disagreeing with these expressions.

5) *How can international solidarity become a weapon in this struggle?*

The Greek crisis has contributed to imposing a regime of isolation on political prisoners, already present in many European countries. In order to terrorize other member states, EU leaders want to present the Greek people as model citizens faithful to neo-liberal austerity policies. That is why this can be a challenge for the Greek movement and people, to organize resistance against this form of violence. International revolutionary solidarity is an essential part of the struggle against the prison reform bill. It is important to make this struggle known as much as possible, and to put pressure on the Greek State. At the moment what happens in Greece is still a matter of world prominence because it can jeopardize the future of the Eurozone. A possibility is offered to revolutionaries all over the world: to take advantage of the changing situation in our country and strengthen their perspectives.

June 2014 — **Kostas Gournas** — Korydallos prison, Athens, Greece