

# **Decoding the Apocalypse of the Militant Greek Left**

the Green Anarchy Collective

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The apparent dismantling of the November 17 (N17) movement (and now, the recent ELA busts) have sparked one of the official Left's periodic confrontations with its deepest political uncertainty; the relevance of their program, analysis and outdated organizational forms to a world that has already witnessed the dreary, oppressive reality of communism and all its offshoots. Fourteen years after the Berlin Wall crumbled into tourist souvenirs, few marxist-leninists have faith in the "dialectically-ordained" revolution that will usher in a classless, communist society. Instead, disillusioned by the state-communist dystopias, many leftists—still intent on "managing" other people's lives—have shifted their focus towards more reformist goals, like socialism. Since most thoughtful people recognize that communism and capitalism are the same dismal story with a different face, the Left (especially here in the US) has been forced to modify its rhetoric, and to engage in anti-authoritarian posturing, in a desperate attempt to keep up with the times and keep their membership-starved organizations alive.

In Greece, nothing exposes the bankruptcy and irrelevance of the Left more than its faint-hearted, pathetic attempts to distance itself from the N17 and ELA urban guerrillas, groups who clearly had a leftist interpretation of the world and who undeniably emerged from the radical left milieu. These arrests constituted an existential crisis for the Greek Left, which tried to explain it all away as a state-orchestrated campaign to attack the Left and curtail their civil liberties! This is because the Left wants to believe that the system still conspires against it, for that is the ultimate proof that it is still seen as a *threat* to the system. But the Left isn't seen as a threat to anything in Greece; it was the invisible assassins and "popular avengers" of N17 that the government wanted to neutralize, because their actions and proclamations reflected the widespread anti-Americanism that has existed in Greece since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, and their communiqués contained more or less what most people said in private conversation. When the N17 arrests began in 2002, and the Left failed to step forward and extend solidarity (to individuals who *sprang from their own ranks*), it fell upon the Greek anarchist movement to rally in support of the captured anti-capitalist guerrillas. Here at *Green Anarchy*, we understood the significance of the events that were unfolding in Greece and tried our best to provide our readers with accurate updates on this massive government clampdown. Now, however, with the trials of the N17 suspects in full swing, we feel its important to take a closer look at the actual *politics* of the N17 movement, in light of recent revelations.

## **What Exactly Where the Political Objectives of N17?**

The first and most basic obstacle to deciphering the politics of the N17 Movement is the lack of reliable information available on them here in North America and the fact that very few of their communiqués have been translated into English. Most of the data we currently have at our disposal comes in the form of theories that Greek prosecutors have formed since the N17 arrests began and can hardly be considered objective or unbiased. Compounding the difficulty further is the refusal of the majority of the N17 suspects to admit to their involvement in the group.

Alexandros Yotopoulos, the 63-year-old "renegade" communist – whom the Greek state describes as the "motor" that kept November 17 going – is steadfastly disavowing any connection with the N17 foot soldiers, and claims he is being targeted by a vindictive U.S. State Department who have never forgotten his anti-Junta activities in the early 1970's. Yotopoulos is being fingered by Greek authorities as the "cultured intellectual" who penned N17's highly informed

proclamations (if this is true, it may well explain why the group elected to send its manifesto to French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre in 1977 - two years after it first appeared in France's left-wing paper, *Liberation*). But Mary Bossi, who has spent 20 years "studying terrorism" in the service of the Greek government, has her doubts about Yotopoulos and believes that the groups' dismantling is far from over. "The only thing Yotopoulos convinces me of is that he wrote proclamations N17 Assassination on demand, as a hired hand. They gave him the work to do," says Bossi, suggesting that Yotopoulos may have just been an N17 employee. Bossi herself was honored with a visit in 1997 by N17 at her doorstep, when they left a "calling card" - 1.5 kilos of dynamite - at her home.

At the opening of the N17 trials (which are expected to last at least five months) Yotopoulos vociferously denounced the proceedings, stating that "I reject the charges, of course. I am here because this is what the Americans and their collaborators in the government, who hate everything Greek, want. I come from a well-known left-wing family. I fought dynamically against the Junta and was convicted of this by a military court. I placed a bomb in the American embassy during the dictatorship. I did not cash in on my anti-dictatorship and anti-American activity and did not join any party, I did not collaborate. The indictment is a cheap Anglo-American fabrication."

The 19 N17 suspects face a total of 2,000 counts of murder, bombing and bank robbery, among other charges. Eleven of the accused, including Yotopoulos, face life sentences. Intelligence agencies are still hunting for other N17 founders, believed to be a small group of 3-5 and known as "the grandfathers of N17". Finding them may prove to be impossible. "They must look in circles of 70's revolutionaries, which includes much of Greece's political elite," said Giorgos Petsos, a former Pasok minister of public order and industry, who survived an N17 assassination attempt in 1989. Petsos claims that the assassination attempt against him was dictated by "political interests" other than N17, linking the attempt with the then-pending corruption trial of Pasok founder and former Prime Minister, Andreas Papandreou. "My disappearance would have served the political interests of the time. The Papandreou trial would not have taken place had I not survived," says Petsos, who also alleges that he was under constant surveillance by the EYP (the Greek Secret Service) around the time of the assassination attempt and that they allowed it to occur. "The people who stand accused are either a small part of the operational branch of N17 or else something entirely separate from the whole structure of terrorism in our country...The heads are clearly missing."

## **Diplomatic Life Behind Bulletproof Glass**

For nearly three decades the price tag for security in Athens was the highest of any U.S. diplomatic community in the world, due to the unpredictable, surprise attacks of groups like N17 and the ELA. At one point, the reward for information leading to the arrest of N17 members was fattened to more than \$9 million (\$5 million of which was pledged by the U.S., who were handing out a flier describing the bounty with every visa issued). Armed leftist groups were the backdrop against which ordinary Greek citizens carried out their affairs, but to fully understand the political climate that helped facilitate the proliferation of so many urban guerrillas, we need to take a closer look at the Greek leftist milieu.

During the military dictatorship in Greece, thousands of anti-Junta leftists fled to Paris, which became the unofficial base for resistance activities. The uprising against the U.S.-backed Junta

gave birth to the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), the political party which has governed Greece for 18 of the past 21 years, and also provided the recruitment reservoir for groups like N17 and ELA who didn't feel the struggle had ended with the establishment of a U.S.-influenced "puppet democracy". Because of their common ideological roots with N17, PASOK has long been dogged by allegations of shielding the group from prosecution. And indeed, as the year passed, it does appear that a complex web of suspicious characters and political interests was established around N17 and ELA, acting to protect them and to obstruct investigations. At this point it is fairly well established that ELA had links with the East German secret police (the Stasi), who had a well-documented track record of financing any group whose activities contributed to the "destabilization of the western democracies". The extent of Stasi influence on ELA can only be guessed at but it does appear that the East German infiltration of the Greek government expanded after 1981 with Stasi agents forming para-state links with the Greek secret service. It was also during this period that N17 and ELA activity was at its peak.

And amidst all these cloak-and-dagger conspiracies and labyrinthine political games were genuinely anarchist elements, like Christos Tsoutsouvis, who received his initial arms and explosives training with ELA, before breaking off from "*Anti-State Struggle*" (a group whose name speaks for itself). In the case of N17, we seem to be dealing with a group who might have had good intelligence contacts within the Greek establishment but who also had anti-state leanings and acted autonomously from the official Greek left. As Ioannis Rahiotis, the lawyer representing Alexandros Yotopoulos, said at the opening of the N17 trials, "N17 represented the 'aggressive left'. Before N17, the left maintained a defensive role. N17 is the quarry that decided to turn hunter... Its activity is clearly political. Call it a crime, but a political crime."

## **Inside the Shadow Wars:**

In October of 2002, Green Anarchy received an English translation of a prison interview with Alexandros Yotopoulos, that originally appeared in the Greek newspaper, Larmia Press. How a written interview was smuggled out of a high-security prison is not known, but the state, humiliated and outraged that Yotopoulos was able to pull something like that off, imposes a week of isolation on him and bars him from having visitors. In this fascinating interview (which will be included in a forthcoming N17 booklet co-published by *Green Anarchy* and *Agitation Press*), Yotopoulos does not admit to his involvement in N17 but alludes to (without incriminating himself) other sects of N17 that are evading arrest; he allows it to be understood that N17 is autonomously organized and that cells take action independently of each other; that about 15 other members are free. Yotopoulos also advocates armed struggle in this interview and states that he does not consider N17 terrorists.

Aside from the Yotopoulos interview, the only direct explanation we have for the underlying politics motivating N17 comes in the form of an interview that Savas Xiros - the first N17 arrestee - gave from a prison pay phone. When asked about the N17 assassinations, Xiros states: "First of all, they were not done out of hate for a certain individual. It is done out of the love for the whole, for the whole that this individual has hurt." When asked what led him to violence: "My conscience took me there. When in front of your eyes horrific things are taking place and you feel that you scream but are not heard, you must do something, you can't stay complacent. I can't

possibly see these things and not react. I don't know if what I did was the best way, but that's what I did and what I'm paying for."

## Sham Opposition and Heaps of Leftist Idiocy

This spring the three judges involved in the N17 trial decided that the trial would not be a "political" one, but strictly criminal. Interestingly enough, in an interview with *NET* state television, a spokesperson for Greece's communist party (KKE) said, "N17 was a group with political aims, and played a political part." However, she added "For us to say that the crimes were political does not mean that we idealize or exonerate them." The KKE then went on to condemn N17 "terrorism" and claimed the group was created by the CIA and the Greek S.S.

These types of shifty, spineless denunciations really come as no surprise; in times of crisis the left has always been characterized by sectarian squabbling and back stabbing. But the Greek left's cowardly abandonment of its own frontline warriors placed many anarchists there in the awkward position of doing solidarity work for a movement many now feel they have serious misgivings about. As one Greek anarchist put it: "Every variety of leftism disassociated itself from N17 because it wants to be respectable. So Greek anarchists came to fill this vacuum of solidarity. By this anarchists supported a left guerrilla group and fought for *rights*, which isn't what we fight for. Leftism deals with such struggles. But the left is absent and anarchists felt the need to fill this lack of solidarity". Other Greek anarchists have expressed severe disappointment over nationalistic statements certain N17 prisoners have been making. With all these criticisms being voiced, it seems like a good a time as any to discuss our views on the left in general.

## Beyond Left and Right, Beyond Control...

Both capitalism and communism are failed systems, soon to be fossils, that attempt to exist outside the natural (biological) world, corrupting everything (the ecology, human health and relationships – even the weather!) with their destructive influence, as our souls bleed a slow death from the meaninglessness of it all. Both capitalism and communism reduce human beings to commodities, where our lives count only as cogs in some system and where every individual is leveled into the anonymous mass or fitted into an organization – or both at once. Under capitalism *or* communism, uniformity and banality characterize the general existence in which all individual subjects of the state have been reduced to zero. Under either system – which both worship at the altar of industrialism – the biosphere itself is wounded and covered over with standardizing uniformity by an abstractly organizing technology, so much so that in many bioregions the landscape already has the appearance of a machine-made commodity and gives off no aura, as if the planet is being rebuilt to become one giant Tokyo interspersed with patches of agriculture. Capitalism and communism are two fronts in a 10,000 year war on wildness and both leave the human spirit limping in alienation. Correlative with the poisonously grey nature of capitalist and communist societies is not only subjective but *objective* boredom. This is not the kind of boredom which eventually exhausts itself (that is, fades after having risen to the level of nausea); it is, rather, a stultifying, omnipresent atmosphere of psychic immiseration that reinforces the profound emptiness of civilized life.

As regular readers of this paper know, about the only thing we have in common with communists is a hatred for capitalism, but for us this extends to a hatred for **all** forms of bureaucracy, **all** forms of government, and an explosive, all-consuming hatred for the industrial system itself. We oppose the state, not merely, as according to Marxist analysis, by virtue of the class interests which the state serves, but by virtue of the fact that **it is the state**. As green anarchists, we stand outside the entire left/right spectrum of political thought (which we regard as a shallow, binary construct of civilized logic) and view the industrial power structure from a **radically** different perspective. Anarchy is not an idealistic experiment in anti-authoritarian theory that we seek to test, it is a mode of existence that we seek to **reclaim**, a condition of unimpeded wildness that has **already existed** and that our species has enjoyed for 99% of our time on this planet — before artificial systems of control like the state, religion, feudalism, socialism, etc., were imposed on us. This is something the left is not able to comprehend about the anarchy movement, as they attempt to corral us into their limited arena and claim ownership over our struggle by labeling anarchists the “extreme, utopian” branch of the ultra-left. But the left’s strategies of containment will not succeed this time around, for we’ve learned from our bitter defeats and our failed opportunities, and we’ll no longer be hoodwinked by the lies of those who would have us believe in the inevitable “withering away of the state”.

This, of course, brings up the question of what other movements of the dispossessed do we support and extend solidarity to, and under what circumstances? Clearly, supporting authoritarian movements and ideologies is going to get us nowhere, but how does this insight apply to a group like N17, who were/are explicitly anti-Stalinist and seem to have wanted something akin to “direct democracy”, and who have also demonstrated solidarity with anarchists in the past? At what point is enough common ground established to render our political differences insignificant and incapable of hampering effective, collaborative resistance against our shared enemy?

We bring these questions up not to undermine support for the N17 prisoners, but because we feel these are the types of questions the anarchist movement needs to be asking itself, as we assert our autonomy from the opportunistic left and renew our struggle with no illusions about what we’re fighting for.

We would love to get some feedback on this article from anarchists in Greece. For more background on the N17 Movement, Movement, check-out the last few issues of *Green Anarchy*.

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