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Athens: the events that gave rise to the incidents of New Smyrna

Union of Green Libertarians

11 March 2020

***Translator's note:** We live in dark times here in Greece. The ghost of Junta haunts the country ever since Mitsotakis and his party came to power. Using the measures against the pandemic as a tool of control and repression and giving the police even greater power has worsened the situation. This text gives a glimpse of the fascistitation of the country by an Athenian comrade who witnessed all the events that led to the recent fiery riots that took and still take place in Greece's capital city and are now spreading in the rest of the country.*

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As an anarchist who lives in Athens I will try to go back in time to just some months ago, for the sake of brevity, so that we can understand how we ended up on the recent events at New Smyrna. The ever more growing policing under the pretext of the pandemic has made its presence felt in every neighbourhood of Athens for

some time now. Gradually and methodically an attempt of heavy repression and restriction is being made not just on us anarchists but on every citizen who protests against the regime...

Already since the summer cops from team DRASI raided shops in Exarcheia terrorising the people with motorbikes and causing physical destruction, while hunting and beating the passer-bys with batons. All these were prompted by the late attempt to re-occupy certain anarchist spaces in Dervenion street, where a solidarity concert was taking place. The outcome was injured passer-bys and damaged shops, where stun grenades were thrown at and arrests were made.

Since the autumn the attempt on silencing our voices was intensified, as they were passing last-moment laws about total prohibitions of gatherings for the entire country, to avoid rallies, even minor ones. Their aim was the big cities of course, where every protest faced the repressive forces before they even started.

On November at Syntagma riot police arrested women who participated in a peaceful and symbolic rally for the day against violence against women. Not only did the cops make arrests, they also terrorised them provocatively by not explaining them the reason behind their arrests, whilst the women followed the measures against the pandemic. At the same time members of the movement against racism reacted on the arrests by throwing flyers, but they got arrested too.

On December, at the city centre, at the memorial protest for the killing of Alexis Grigoropoulos the cops showed once again that they are not let up by any peaceful protest or act of commemoration. Chemical strikes took the lead here too, and they even chased the protestors until they reached the entrances of their apartment buildings and homes. The beatings of course were not restricted to the protesters but were extended to journalists too, who constantly shouted that they are reporters of the events. The cops arrested violently many passer-bys without reason, just because they were present on site and they shut their mouths so that they wouldn't

yell inside the police cars. Even if the protestors abided by the measures against the pandemic or even if they were sole individuals – like Alexis’ professor himself – they faithfully executed the order to prevent the protest, even preventing people from laying down a flower on the site where the student left his last breath. The highlight of the events was when the cops desecrated a banquet that was left on the said site; they were smashing it against each other, broke it down and threw it away...

Since January, the attempts of repressing the protests against the law for university policing were intensified. The traffic on the streets was disrupted multiple times, the metros were closed, riot police units encircled us. We received beatings with batons, students and protestors alike, while our eyes were burning and our breath was cut by the chemicals that they were throwing on us. The intentions of the cops for the alleged protection of the universities was clear... Both Athens and Thessaloniki are leading cities in rallies and one by one the rectorships are differentiating their positions from the government, refusing to let subsidiarity on protection be lost from universities.

Afterwards, we see the streets of Athens filling up with people who react on the torturous dying of hunger striker D. Koufontinas, as well as artists and comrades who protest against the new backwards bill which restricts freedom of expression on internet when it supposedly refers to violence. February continued with protests against art censorship, while rallies against university policing escalated.

From this period onwards, the centre of opposition appears to have moved from Exarcheia to every neighbourhood of Athens. New restrictions on traffic, new measures for the disbandment of the slightest gathering. On-street inspections by cops from team Drasi are intensified. Riot police pour out into each suburb and patrol the neighbourhoods. Minor incidents and injuries without reason become an everyday phenomenon. It’s even more clear now that riot police is not present on our side to repress the pandemic,

but to repress our voices. Now they don't just terrorise our comrades, the anarchists and whoever takes part in protests, but even families and mere citizens who went out for a walk.

The state tightens the noose, the tension escalates. A cop in Cholargos, after a random crash with another car, argues with the driver, takes his gun out and shoots at the crashed car, fortunately without causing injuries. In Chalandri, a very small anarchist team, who raised a banner and threw flyers for the hunger strike of D. Koufontinas was dispersed by riot police before they could even begin their peaceful march. Riot police units intrude violently in the alleys and reach a public market, where they find and hunt down and beat with batons the fleeing protesters. They catch and forcibly carry and drag the girl who held the banner, in front of the terrorised looks of the passer-bys, in their very neighbourhood. The girl was accused among other things with force and resistance against the authorities.

In New Smyrna, Delta cop teams start approaching and asking families and children, with despicable manner, why they are outside, threatening them with fines. Without absolutely no reason they start beating a student, who, like others, asked them why they are doing this. The student received beatings and brute force on his entire body from other cops as well who attacked with metallic batons, while the student screamed that he is in pain, to no avail. The residents and the passer-bys reacted strongly and began a protesting march in the area. Two days later, incidents are recorded in Panormou, when people gathered outside the metro to protest against police violence and the events at New Smyrna. Riot police units got together and attacked with chemicals and stun grenades to disperse the rally. They hunted them in the streets, made arrests and they broke down lights of parked cars with batons in a further attempt of show of power.

For so many months we remain silent and when we react we get beaten from the repressive forces, even in peaceful protests. For so many months we see a show of autarchy and absurd prohibi-

tions unfolding not just at the centre of Exarcheia, but at the other neighbourhoods too. Fascist restrictions do not help in mitigating the pandemic, seeing that Covid cases grow rapidly everyday. The fascist restrictions and repression that the state dictates via the cops aim in our silence. Repression deters our expression, we see ourselves living in another period of junta, supposedly for our own security. Which security? We run the gauntlet of riot police in every square, we run the gauntlet of beatings, of oppression, of irony. And the violence begins by the powerful against us. Cops and riot police units attack us and remain unpunished. We are not secure. Athens, as the largest urban centre of the country, has received for months the greatest repression. They drown us in violence and then they wonder why we fight back.

The major rally that was organised in New Smyrna and the incidents that followed in 9/3 showed that the die is cast. The crowd quickly received the attacks of the cops, who tried to disperse the rally and the protesting march against police violence. The police vans were lined up early to send a message to the gathered comrades. The situation went out of control, literal war broke out and the streets became fields of battle. Some cops even drew weapons in the neighbourhoods. Water canons were deployed and police motorbikes were menacingly brushing past people, throwing stun grenades. Cops trampled and dragged protesters, attacked and slapped others, while they were shouting offensive slogans. When someone charged and threw with force a cop from his motorbike, some cops from team Drasi yelled "let's go and kill them". No, we will not stand by the hurt cop, we will stand by our rights and freedom that get hurt daily, by our students and our anarchist comrades and whoever receives violence and threats by the police. The incidents in New Smyrna give a reminder that when you treat people with violence and repression, the resulting outburst will be so great that it will destroy everything.