

Anarchism in Greece

Antonios Vradis & Dimitrios K. Dalakoglou

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Greek anarchy stands among the largest and most active contemporary movements of its kind in the world. The first organized anarchist group in the country appeared as early as 1876. Near-complete lack of anarchist activity between World War II and the military dictatorship (1967–74) effectively divides the history of Greek anarchism into two distinct phases, 1876–1944 and 1967–present.

1876–1944

Individual anarchists were politically active from the early 1860s (Emanouil Dadaoglou, Amilcare Cipriani, Mikelis Avlihos), while the first organized anarchist group, the Democratic Club of Patras, appeared in 1876. In the same year, the club became affiliated to the Jura Federation – the anarchist/anti-authoritarian section of the First International. The club was also quick to help form a – primarily regional – federation (Democratic League of the People) and to publish the first anarchist newspaper in the country (*Hellenic Democracy*, 1877). A few months after the foundation of the Patras group an anarchist working club was formed on the island of Syros. This club played an instrumental role in the island’s 1879 tannery and shipyard strikes.

In 1898 a group named the Boatmen of Thessaloniki was formed and acted in the spirit of propaganda by the deed: the group’s members, of Bulgarian origin, carried out deadly attacks against targets including the city’s Ottoman bank, hotels, a theater, and light and gas pipes. Nearly all of the group’s members were executed. In 1913, again in Thessaloniki, anarchosyndicalist Alexandros Schinas assassinated King George I.

In the early twentieth century organized groups faded and Greek anarchism centered around the political activity of individuals. In August 1916 anarchosyndicalist Konstantinos Speras (1893–1943) helped organize the historic miners’ strike on the island of Serifos, where four workers were killed by the royalist gendarmes. Speras also participated in the fermentation which led to the foundation of the Greek General Confederation of Labor.

The example of Serifos was followed repeatedly for the next 20 years with strikes around the country. The strike of Kalamata (1934) culminated in three days of unrest and ended with a full-scale riot and seven workers killed by the army. Two years later, in 1936, Thessaloniki saw one of the largest pre-World War II strikes, counting 12 dead workers. Cobbler Yiannis Tamtakos participated in the strike and was sentenced as one of its instigators. Tamtakos (1908–2008) was an active anarchist throughout the final decades of his life.

1967–Present

In its most recent phase anarchism in Greece has largely broken away from its anarchosyndicalist origins, now organized around small direct action-based groups and hence much closer to the insurrectionary current. The country’s main urban centers (Athens, Thessaloniki, and Patras) host nuclei of intense anarchist activity, while anarchism’s popularity among university students has meant that smaller cities with higher education institutions have also seen a growth of such activity.

During and immediately after the country’s military dictatorship (1967–74) the anarchist movement resurged – largely thanks to popular resistance to the regime and widening political polarization within the country. Anti-dictatorship resistance reached its peak with the Technical Uni-

versity of Athens student uprising of November 17, 1973. While the outlawed left-wing parties largely failed to influence the uprising to any significant extent, some of the slogans – “Down with Authority” and “People Revolt” – had anarchist connotations.

Following the collapse of the dictatorship, parliamentary democracy inherited most of the authoritarian state apparatus intact. This fact is exemplified by the police assassination of demonstrators Iakovos Koumis and Stamatina Kanelopoulou in Athens in 1980 and the assassination of anarchist Michalis Kaltezas in 1985.

The anarchist movement reached a peak of activity between 1989 and 1995, partially boosted by widespread disillusionment with the country’s mainstream political scene. The 1990s began and ended with high school students and teachers rebelling against proposed conservative educational reform bills (1990–1, 1998–2000). Left-wing and anarchist groups played an instrumental role within these struggles. Students occupied the majority of schools across the country and organized demonstrations, often ending in police violence and riots. On November, 18, 1995 more than 500 anarchists were arrested following riots at the National Technical University of Athens. Most were convicted; a similar wave of arrests after the November 17 commemoration in 1998 cost the movement dearly and it subsequently entered a short period of decline.

The turning point for contemporary anarchism in Greece was the movement against globalization. Greek anarchists had a strong presence at Genoa’s anti-G8 mobilizations in 2001. Two years later the 2003 European Union Leader Summit in Thessaloniki was greeted by a 3,000-strong black bloc, while a 5,000-strong anarchist demonstration marched through the city to express their solidarity with migrants, who comprised one of the most heavily exploited and repressed social groups in the country.

Recent years have seen an intensification of state repression against an ever-growing anarchist movement. In January 2008 more than ten anarchists were either in prison, awaiting trial, and/or absconding from justice as the state convulsed in reaction to a movement becoming more influential, holding an increasingly active role in recent struggles in the country, focusing – among others – on education, ecology, employment, state repression, and migration. Most recently, police have again fired against demonstrators, for example at the higher education students’ demonstration of March 1, 2007.

State violence and repression acted – to some extent – as a greenhouse for anarchism, increasing its influence. Since the 1980s Athens boasts two anarchist publishing houses (Free Press and International Library) and numerous regularly published magazines at any given time, along with hundreds of brochures and poster campaigns every year. Squats have emerged and anarchist collectives have appeared all across the country. In parallel to a mass anarchist movement, Greece witnesses the emergence of clandestine anarchist activity, primarily arson and casualty free explosions of symbolic targets. In January 2008 alone the country saw more than ten actions of this kind.

SEE ALSO: Anarchosyndicalism ; G8 Protests, Genoa, 2001 ; Global Justice Movement and Resistance ; Greece, Anti-Dictatorship Protests

References And Suggested Readings

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