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Greece and the Anarchist Movement

Anarchist Federation

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The frenzied militantism , the fragmentation into small groups, must be replaced by a united , specific anarchist communist organisation with its foundations in a thoughtful activism and the development of theory and strategy. Already some comrades are beginning to see the deficiencies of the movement and are working towards the development of a weekly Greece-wide paper.

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house-searches, anybody that looked “different” was beaten up by the riot cops. Alongside this was the development of armed anarchist groups that carried out a number of bank-robberies and armed confrontations with the police. For example the Anti-State Struggle group, shot dead the Public Prosecutor of Athens. In a subsequent gun-battle with police in May 1985, in which 3 cops died, the anarchist Christos Tsoutsouvis was killed .

Cult of Violence

This method of operating has continued up to the present day. Alongside continued rioting and confrontations at demonstrations where banks, government offices, car showrooms, and luxury hotels are stoned and burned down, is the presence of 30 armed anarchist groups which carry out petrol-bombings and bombings in the Athens area. While not denying the heroism involved in attacks on the State, and the seething discontent among the urban youth, one notes the cult of violence that continues in the movement, and that leads to a massive turnover and the burning-out of many militants by the age of 25. As a result there are few experienced militants in the movement, and the generation gap is noticeable. The Greek anarchist movement lives within a ghetto, a far larger one than the British anarchist movement, it must be admitted, and one that is welcoming and supportive, but it is a ghetto nevertheless. Balavas, a militant arrested in 1994, was “supported” by a number of bomb explosions during his hunger strike in prison. He wrote an article recommending the “ kids to stop amusing themselves with gas canisters that were only good for heating up coffee”.

These tactics are self-destructive and must be replaced by a strategy that relates to the everyday struggle of the mass of the working-class in both towns and village, as well as the development of a mass united propaganda and education programme.

The Anarchist Movement

The movement is strongest in Athens and Thessalonika. It is centred around a number of squatted buildings used as social centres (one in Thessalonika, Villa Varvara, and 2 in Athens). At these venues a regular and frequent number of music concerts take place, there are bookstalls selling anarchist literature as well as cafes open from the afternoon. Anarchists of every tendency congregate there, though there are very few debates or discussions. In fact there is very little discussion of theory within the movement, ways to move forward or to relate to the working class. Three alternative radio stations operate, apparently quite well. The movement and the centres attract considerable numbers of young people, to be numbered in the thousands, but there is very little real contact with the mass of the town population, let alone that of the countryside.

The movement that began to develop in the 70s continuing up to the present day, was strongly influenced by both German and Italian autonomism, not to mention the armed struggle mystique of the Baader-Meinhof group and the Armed Cells of West Germany, and was shaped by the 1973 insurrection against the colonels. The Anarchist Attack Groups formed in Athens in the mid-80s, specialised in petrol-bombing police cars on a massive scale. On November 17th, 1985 when riot police chased anarchists to the traditional anarchist stronghold around Exarchia Square, fierce fighting took place resulting in the shooting in the back of a 15-year old anarchist, Michalis Kaltazas, by the cops. This sparked off further fighting and the occupation of the University of Chemistry, and then that of the Polytechnic, as well as occupations of buildings, riots and demonstrations in many other cities. 37 anarchists arrested at the Chemistry occupation were brutally beaten, receiving jail sentences and fines. Kaltazas was dead, an

d a new wave of repression began against the anarchist movement. Many anarchists were arrested, there were many

IN 1993 WHILST Greece was celebrating 20 years of “democracy” dating from the collapse of the colonels’ regime, the international press was working itself into a frenzy over the risk of fascism there with the mobilisation of a million people at Thessaloniki around the slogan “Macedonia is Greek!” This demonstration was the result of 3 years incessant propaganda in all the media of an unprecedented intensity, involving both Right and Left and effecting all classes.

The trauma of the colonels’ dictatorship and the process of its collapse resulted in the polarisation of the political class into Left and Right, with their own respective functionaries employed by the administrations they controlled, 2 different camps of exiles, and even dynasties of both Left and Right with their own allies. In this context the political differences of the different ruling elites take on the nature of a war between clans. The “Macedonian problem” effects the interests of both Left and Right and threatens the precarious national unity. Each camp mobilised to “assemble the Greeks”. Neo Democracy (ND) the party of the traditional right led by Mitsotakis was relatively moderate in its approach, allowing Papandreu, head of PASOK, the Greek Socialist Party, to revive his party’s fortunes with nationalistic attacks on the Turks, Albanians and “pseudo-Macedonians”.

The mass demonstration was considerably aided by schools being given a special holiday for that date, and shop-keepers being “advised” to shut up shop. Added to this was the punishment dished out to students who had torn down posters for the demo, who were barred from all colleges in Epirus, the north-west region of Greece. The year before a similar demo had only mobilised 100 people.

Greek nationalism undoubtedly has some life in it yet, but under a very precise form- a hankering for the past and a strong anti-Europeanism. In 1992 the Communist Party (KKE) and PASOK campaigned during the elections under the slogan “No to Maastricht”, which didn’t stop any MP elected from these

parties taking a pro-Europe position, and to forget the promise made by PASOK to get rid of the American bases.

Despite this, it is still very difficult to mobilise around anti-immigration and national purity, or the peril from the South as many Greeks have a history of immigration in France, Germany, the United States and Australia. The recent influx of impoverished Albanians has no precedents in Greece. As to emergent neo-fascism, what can be made of small numbers of mainly old people nostalgic for the days of the colonels voting for a fascist party, and the hundred skinheads in a population of six million in Athens? It would be rash to point to the emergence of a mass fascist movement.

Swift Reaction

At the end of 1991, the ruling ND unveiled its plans for education: privatisations, compulsory uniforms, and the singing of the national hymn and prayers at morning assemblies (Greek taxes still finance the Orthodox Church). The reaction was swift. November saw the first demonstrations with up to 20,000 taking part, and the first occupations of schools. In a month 95% of schools in Greece were occupied, with very strong support from parents. The holidays allowed the right and its extreme right allies to occupy the schools themselves on the first day of the new term. Fights broke out and one PASOK teacher had his head bashed in. The following day, 100,000 demonstrated in Athens, without incidents. The day after another demonstration took place, larger still, and Omonia Square, one of Athens' great squares was occupied. Anarchist groups attacked several police vehicles. The youth organisation of ND was teargassed by the police! The police attempted to disperse the crowd and one of their grenades set fire to a shop, where 5 people died. As night fell, barricades were built. The University of Athens (Polytechnic) was occupied by more than a

1,000 demonstrators who stayed there all night, turning the lecture halls into makeshift hospitals or molotov cocktail factories. The local population supplied them with food. The following day and night the confrontations continued, until the slow collapse of the movement with the suspension of the education reforms.

In summer 1992, 30 people from left and right were arrested for the murder of the teacher. Sentences were handed out to all, putting defenders and murderers on the same footing. In autumn, the same education law in disguise was introduced and the occupations began again on October 17th. The Polytechnic was again occupied. On the 24th a fire broke out in the Rector's office. The occupiers called the fire brigade which does not turn up. The police accused anarchists of starting the fire, and anarchists replied by claiming the fire was a police provocation. The fire was used as a pretext for armed intervention which broke the habeas corpus (a clause banning the Army from intervention on university grounds) and a number of arrests took place. Everyone should remember that 20 years before, in 1973, Army tanks penetrated the great doors of the University, resulting in many deaths. (This was the beginning of the end of the colonels' regime). A poster was flyposted massively, comparing the incident to the Reichstag fire. The underground armed group 17th November carried out a bomb attack "against the repression". The following day 33 fly-posters, all members of anarchist groups, were rounded up and tortured. The movement petered out.

On another level, also taking place during Summer 1992, was the attempt by Mitsotakis to implement his plans for "restructuring", starting off with privatising the Athens bus service, which he described as "worn-out and loss-making". After 3 months of strikes spilling over into street confrontations, the total paralysis of the capital and the Army moving in to drive buses, the privatisation plan was abandoned.