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Fighting fascism and austerity in Greece

Wild Rose Collective

May 18, 2013

On Wednesday, April 10, Wild Rose Collective co-hosted an event in Iowa City, Iowa with Pavlos speaking as part of a continental speaking tour about resistance in Greece to both fascism and austerity measures. This event was well attended by about 30 people, and raised over \$300 to send to Greek social movement activity.

Pavlos spoke on many important issues and movement work in Greece. This also included a very relevant accounting of the 20th century history of occupation, dictatorship and repression in that country. We heard how these experiences have informed the Greek people's attitudes toward the police and government, and what resistance looks like and is thought of there. He talked about how the police are remembered as collaborators with occupiers, and on the side of the dictatorship and against the people.

Pavlos clarified that what we refer to as 'riots' following the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos in late 2008 are instead known in Greece as the December Uprising. This is an important distinction, Pavlos explained, because people weren't simply running wild in

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the streets, but acting with a political compass and targeting banks, government offices, etc. That the uprising has come to be known as riots in the Western media, removing the political content of the actions. The December Uprising also impacted later movements in Greece that emerged in response to severe austerity measures.

We learned about the neo-fascist group Golden Dawn, its recent rise to political power (it is now the fifth most represented party in the Greek government), and the threat it poses. Pavlos spoke of how, within the last 10 years, Greece has seen a massive change in population demographics, with anti-immigrant sentiment appealing to some. In addition to this, the economic desperation of most Greeks has led to an equally desperate search for a cause and a solution, resulting in an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment. While Greece has a majority politically left-leaning culture, there has been a smaller, but consistent current of fascism and the far right during the last century. And for just as long there has been a popular resistance to it.

Pavlos also spoke to the situation of a failing state and capital and its consequences. For example, suicide rates have skyrocketed. Pavlos anecdotally shared that nearly every person seems to know someone who has killed themselves, making it a common and unsurprising topic of conversation in Greece. The increase in cost of home heating has meant that many homes are using firewood, causing an increase in pollution, respiratory illnesses, and there have been several deaths from fires and carbon monoxide poisoning in Athens and other places. Huge wage cuts are the norm, some as high as 70%, and many public workers go for months at a time with no payment at all.

With this as the backdrop, popular assemblies have emerged in many locations. These began as mass occupations of City Halls somewhat like the U.S.'s Occupy in city parks. The occupations spread throughout Greece, and some have continued. They are often made up of working class Greeks and reflect their concerns and needs, in places running some local services by directly demo-

cratic process in the assemblies. We heard how these assemblies serve as an inspiring example of resistance to crisis and austerity. The biggest inspiration and lesson from the assemblies, for Pavlos and for us, is not to just get through the crisis, but to remake our relationships to each other and how we manage our lives day-in and day-out. This, Pavlos told us, is the most radical aspect of what is happening in Greece.