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Greece

The Intervention of the FI in Greece

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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This article is a slightly updated version of an introduction made in the context of the Conference for the 75th anniversary of the Fourth International. The Conference was held in Mannheim in November 2013.

1. A few historical remarks

In Greece, the Fourth International has a long history. There has been a section of the FI in Greece since its foundation in 1938.

In 1928, the "Spartakos Group" (publishing a journal bearing the same name) was founded as a left opposition within the Greek Communist Party (KKE). The leader of the Group was Pantelis Pouliopoulos the first Secretary of the KKE. The journal "Spartakos" published translations of the documents of the International Left Opposition in Greek and also on the spot analyses of Greek capitalism. In 1934, militants largely originating from the "Spartakos Group" along with a group split from the Archeiomarxists (led by Michel Raptis – Pablo) founded the Organization of Communist Internationalists of Greece - OKDE.

In 1938, OKDE was represented in the founding Congress of the FI, by Michel Raptis (Pablo). Just after the creation of the FI, OKDE became the Greek section. After the Second World War, following a Unification Conference in 1946 with other Trotskyist forces, the Communist Internationalist Party of Greece (KDKE) was founded and continued to be the Greek section of the FI until 1974. After the fall of the military dictatorship, in 1974, KDKE returned to the name OKDE, and finally, in 1986, following a split with forces that gradually moved away from the FI, our organization took its present name: OKDE-Spartakos (Greek section of the FI). Thus 2014 will mark 80 years of continuous presence of the Greek section of the FI in Greece.

When the "Spartakos Group" was created in 1928, it included a number of the most important cadres of KKE, including not only its first General Secretary, Pantelis Pouliopoulos, but also the first Secretary of the Communist Youth and the first Director of the KKE newspaper. Pouliopoulos, in particular, was a very important intellectual and a leading member of the communist soldiers' groups opposing the war against Turkey in 1922.

In 1936, the Metaxas dictatorship was imposed on the Greek people, followed by 9 months of war and then the Nazi occupation of the country until 1944. Due to the persecutions of the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1940) and later both of the Nazis and the Stalinists, the Greek section of the FI was nearly physically exterminated.

Pouliopoulos himself was executed by a firing squad of Italian fascists in 1943, as were other comrades. It is still a matter for historical investigation to identify the exact number of FI comrades that were executed or murdered by Greek fascists, Nazis and Stalinists in the period 1936-1945.

The remaining comrades, having the analysis it was an inter-imperialist war, went on fighting both German and British imperialism, as well as the Greek bourgeoisie, under very difficult circumstances.

The majority of the leadership of the Greek section, however, made a major mistake, underestimating the importance of the demand for national liberation during the German occupation, and took a sectarian position against the EAM

(National Liberation Front – the resistance front). The EAM was led by KKE and its leadership followed a treacherous Peoples' Front strategy of collaboration with the national bourgeoisie that resulted, in the end, in the defeat of KKE. But nevertheless, the movement it led was a genuine popular uprising with a revolutionary dynamic.

Unfortunately, it was only the minority of the leadership of the FI section in those days that took a non-sectarian approach to the EAM masses in accordance with the line of the European Secretariat of the FI. The choice of the majority of the leadership of the Greek section politically marginalized the Greek section for a decade.

In the 1960s, under the leadership of those who were a minority in the late 1940s, KDKE was the biggest group to the left of KKE. Severe persecution during the military dictatorship (1967-74) had a negative impact on its dynamic. Many of our comrades were imprisoned or exiled. Despite this, our militants played a key role in the historic revolt of the Polytechnic School in 1973, especially in organizing the Workers' Assembly, and in 1974 (after the collapse of the military junta) our newspaper was the first to be sold in the streets, long before the KKE newspaper appeared.

2. Our politics today

Let's now turn to our activity nowadays. OKDE-Spartakos is a small organization of around 100 members, located within a constellation of far left groups with a multiplicity of origins, as one can imagine.

Despite our small size, we are active in several sectors of the mass movement:

– in the trade unions, mostly through our participation in “Paremvaseis” (Interventions), the radical platform of the far left (ANTARSYA and others). In some sectors the “Paremvaseis” Platform has a very important influence: e.g. it leads many local unions of primary and secondary school teachers, and played a key role in the recent secondary school teachers' strikes; it is the majority in many local Municipal workers' unions etc. It also has a considerable presence in some union federations, especially in the public sector. In the new Executive Committee elected at the most recent Congress of ADEDY (the National Confederation of Public Sector Employees), in November 2013, the “Paremvaseis” Platform has as many members as the KKE!

– in the university students' movement, we are active in EAAK, the far left coalition of students with around 1000 members. EAAK has led every student mobilization since 1991. In the Students Unions elections, EAAK scores around 12% - 14% nationally, more than double SYRIZA's students' platform.

– the antifascist movement is perhaps the most successful sector of our work. This task has been underestimated for many years by the majority of the left, including the far left (and most of the organizations of ANTARSYA). OKDE-Spartakos has been working for a long time in local neighborhood antifascist assemblies, often along with anarchists, as well as in any attempt to coordinate all these initiatives. We have been supporting the proposal for a united front of all left and anarchist organizations in action against fascism, as well as the need to organize the social movement's self-defence. We played an important role in the campaign that managed to cancel the international Nazi camp in Greece this summer. Our practical work is complemented by the publication of books and pamphlets analysing fascism from a Marxist point of view.

As you know, there is a real fascist danger in Greece nowadays, with the rise of the Golden Dawn Neonazi Party. They have 18 deputies in the Parliament, polling more than 10%. The most important thing is that they have organized local groups based on decomposing petty-bourgeois strata, on shop-owners hit by the crisis, on mafia capitalist circles, and on unemployed youth sectors. They started by attacking immigrants and later they moved

further by attacking workers' organizations, leftists and anarchists. The recent murder of the antifascist hip-hop singer Pavlos Fyssas (Killah P) in September 18 2013 triggered big antifascist protests and a demonstration against the Nazi headquarters. It is worth mentioning that at its maximum height this movement, and I mean the 30,000 people demo marching on the Golden Dawn HQ in September 25 2013, ANTARSYA, despite all its previous contradictions, was the largest and most significant actor, in contrast to SYRIZA whose contingent of a few hundred people preferred to attend a concert in Syndagma Square.

– our section is one of the few organizations with a presence in the feminist movement, which is rather underdeveloped in Greece.

– some of our young comrades are active in the network for the democratic rights of soldiers (in Greece there is still a conscription army)

– some comrades are active in local urban movements, mostly in some districts of Athens

– last year, we founded an Institute in Athens, where seminars and discussions are held every weekend

3. Our work with Antarsya and FI supporters

Since its foundation in 2009, we have participated in ANTARSYA, an anticapitalist coalition founded on the basis of political and organizational independence from reformism.

There has always been a whole range of organizations and militants to the left of the two reformist parties, the KKE (a Stalinist party that currently follows a third-period, bureaucratic and ultra-pessimist line) and the Synaspismos Party (post euro-communist party, following a modern, left social-democratic line). Some of them decided to follow the Synaspismos party into SYRIZA. Most of the others, having cooperated for a long time within EAAK and “Paremvaseis”, allied in ANTARSYA.

ANTARSYA has 3000 members, mostly young people. It has failed to score more than 2% in regional elections and 1.2% in national elections, under the electoral pressure of the reformism of SYRIZA. Its real dynamic is bigger, though. ANTARSYA is visible on a national scale, it has led a considerable number of struggles and it has a remarkable presence in several unions. Its programme is still quite vague and ambiguous, with some stalinist influence (that's why we would not consider dissolving the section in this front), however it is clearly governed by revolutionary ideas and it consciously calls for a radical rupture with Capital, the bourgeois state institutions, the EU, and all imperialist alliances.

Apart from the section, in Greece there are also some other groups who identify in one way or another with the FI.

Kokkino is a small group originating mostly from the IST. They have permanent observer status in the FI. They participate in SYRIZA, supporting its Left Platform. Kokkino, in the process of the last SYRIZA Conference suffered a triple split losing half of its membership, which supported the majority Tsipras Platform. The Left Platform in SYRIZA is led by the bureaucracy of the Left Current of the former Synaspismos and supported also by DEA.

DEA is a somewhat bigger organization, also a split from the IST (in fact Kokkino is a split of DEA). They don't have any formal status in the FI, but they have been invited to take part in the FI meetings as a guest since last year.

Our relations with Kokkino are good. We have cooperated in the antifascist movement and in organizing two FI youth camps in Greece, but actually our organizational links are loose. The reason is that both Kokkino and DEA (DEA even more so) are too devoted to the work within SYRIZA and its platforms in the Unions. Despite criticising the leadership of SYRIZA, they finally subordinate themselves to it. Let me give just one example: DEA refused to join the big demonstration against the Golden Dawn national headquarters in October, only because the SYRIZA leadership refused, in the name of “responsibility” and for the stability of the country.

OKDE-Ergatiki Pali (Worker's Struggle), our old split from the 1980s, adheres to the “Mandelist” [\[1\]](#) tradition, but does not have any real link to the FI any more. We cooperate occasionally in publishing books or documents of our shared historical current.

4. Our political tasks

You certainly know some things about the present situation in Greece, so I won't waste your time with data you can find in journals. The economic and political crisis in Greece is not at all resolved. We have now an extremely authoritarian and conservative government, by New Democracy and PASOK.

What I would like to underline is that the situation is deeply contradictory.

On the one hand, we are suffering continuous attacks by Capital and its personnel that worsen the living conditions, as well as the self-confidence of working people – on the other hand, they do so only at the cost of the loss of their hegemony.

On the one hand, we have suffered continuous defeats, as the mass movement has hardly managed to prevent any austerity measures – on the other hand, new strata of the oppressed have gathered valuable experience for the future struggles that will certainly come, as the system cannot re-stabilize.

On the one hand, fascism threatens to divide and individualize the oppressed, terrorize and destroy their organizations – on the other hand, the fight against fascism may very well turn into a fight against capitalism itself.

What are the reasons for our belief that we need an independent anticapitalist left in Greece, outside the CP and SYRIZA?

First of all, we have to make clear that both those parties are incapable of offering a solution in favour of workers' interests. SYRIZA inspired hopes, when it came second in the national elections of May and then June 2012. It has been always dominated by the reformist party of Synaspismos, however it has undergone a further social-democratic mutation as it has got closer to government. Its programme nowadays is something really close to Die Linke, and is actually far inferior compared to the PASOK programme when it first won the elections in 1981. It is incorporating a whole range of former PASOK bureaucrats. It does not meet the criterion of independence from the bourgeois institutions, set by our International. Neither does it meet the criterion of internal democracy, as, by its last conference decision, it forced all organizations within it to dissolve.

Our analysis is that SYRIZA is clearly using the mass movement to support its march to power, instead of using its perspective to gain power to support the mass movement.

An indication of this is the fact that they have betrayed the secondary school teachers' strike twice in a few months: once in the spring, when their elected unionists in the federation cancelled a general strike voted for by the general assemblies because it was forbidden by the government, and once more in September 2013, when they voted to end a new general strike 7 days after it started. They refuse to take part in the demonstrations against the Nazis' headquarters, but at the same time they call on all "constitutional" parties, including the governing New Democracy rightwing party that nurtured the Nazis for all these years, to discuss how to fight fascism together. They are cooperating with the far right anti-memorandum party of the Independent Greeks. All this is quite obvious now. And the Kokkino comrades agree with them.

On 8 January 2014 SYRIZA gave a new proof of their political orientation. It was the day of the inauguration of the Greek presidency of the EU. The government and the police prohibited any demonstration on this day, which was a quite unprecedented occurrence. ANTARSYA called for a joint demonstration of all the left against the EU, the government and the authoritarian ban. SYRIZA denounced the ban, but just did nothing (neither did the Left Platform, nor the Communist Party). A demonstration of more than 1,000 people, most of them ANTARSYA members, actually happened, despite the ban, the police attacks and the boycott by the reformist left.]

But still, the question can be asked, why not be an oppositional current within one of those parties, SYRIZA or the KKE? The reasons should be sought in the concrete conditions of the class struggle in Greece.

a. Greece is one of the countries most badly hit by the crisis in the world. There doesn't seem to be any way out, despite all the austerity measures and the collapse of every single welfare institution and public service. There are more austerity measures to come. Some 70% of the employees in the biggest universities are being fired, that's why we are now in the eleventh week of a university strike. This is just the most recent example. In the face of the devastating effects of the crisis, we need to be more, rather than less, militant and aggressive, given also the high level of the struggles. There is no way out of the crisis in favour of our interests and needs within the framework of the capitalist rules and the bourgeois institutions. We need to attack, not to defend – this is our basic approach of the period.

b. There is not a stable, historical link of the masses with the reformist leaderships any more. The support for SYRIZA is something unstable, not enthusiastic, a "lesser evil" tactic in the eyes of most of its supporters. Social consciousness is liquid and abrupt leaps are to be expected – this is the second pillar of our approach

c. The idea of an independent anticapitalist and revolutionary left in Greece is not something imaginary. There is a really existing space of such militants, who have worked together in various collectives and unions for many years. This space would be autonomously expressed anyway – if we had joined SYRIZA, somebody else would have regrouped them.

d. Based on the former remarks, we think that the problem in Greece is not a supposed re-stabilization of capitalism or a lack of combativeness of the masses, but a conscious subject that can organize the vanguard and offer a concrete revolutionary perspective. We have to work on this subjective factor, build it right now, and not count on objective factors and on estimations about the possible trajectories of reformism. If we are not independent, we can affect neither reformism nor the class struggle itself.

ANTARSYA is still in a contradictory process. It is facing strategic dilemmas. It is an important tool, though. ANTARSYA has supported the secondary teachers up to the end. It is playing a key role in the strikes in the universities now, as will do soon in the hospitals, where we have a lot of comrades. But the most important factor is this: ANTARSYA is not limiting its combativeness due to the restrictions posed by the parliamentary politics.

As a conclusion a few words about what to do:

- We need a united front in action against capitalist attacks and fascism, in order to coordinate all social struggles, as each one separately, no matter how heroic, can't win (ANTARSYA is proposing such a front)
- We need a united and independent anticapitalist and revolutionary left, able to propose a modern transitional program to overthrow capitalism
- We need to maintain our distinct organization, the FI section, within such a front, as strategic questions, far from becoming obsolete, are getting even more relevant today
- We have to explain that no “left” government can offer a solution to workers and the oppressed. No former eurocommunist or social-democratic bureaucracy, no renegotiation within the framework of the EU and the bourgeois institutions, no “national development plan” without the memorandum, but with the right of individual property intact.

If ANTARSYA had elected Deputies in the Parliament, we would consider a conditional vote for a left (SYRIZA) government. We wouldn't take part in it though. We would insist on saying that the only way out is massive struggles, self-organization and a revolutionary strategy.

Since we don't have any deputies, we cannot just withdraw from the elections, given that SYRIZA does not propose or accept a programme similar to ours. ANTARSYA met SYRIZA after the May 2012 election, proposing some key demands which we consider indispensable, such as: break with the EU and the euro, cancel the debt, nationalize the strategic sectors of the economy without any compensation, workers' control etc. Obviously, they were rejected. Nevertheless, we still believe that it is absolutely crucial that somebody puts forward such an anticapitalist transitional programme. We cannot sacrifice it in the name of an abstract “unity of the left”, which in practice means tailing behind reformism.

We use the slogan for a workers government, but we have also to keep in mind what the Transitional Programme says:

- a. The eventuality of a real workers government (i.e. a government genuinely in favor of workers' interests) within a bourgeois state is extremely improbable, even though not impossible;
- b. In any case, we need an independent organization of revolutionary Communists in order to have any influence in the developments that such a government would provoke (so, not fuse in the governing party).

Contrary to a stageist approach, which claims that a “simple class” (i.e. reformist) consciousness is a necessary stage we have to go through before being able to speak about a revolution, our task today is to construct both class and revolutionary consciousness simultaneously. Revolution may seem impossible to the majority of the working class, but it is reform what is objectively impossible.

[1] From the name of Ernest Mandel, the major postwar leader of the Fourth International (United Secretariat of the Fourth International, as our current was known after the 1963). Mandel was also a notable economist, author of *Late Capitalism*.