



Fascists in Greece:

From the streets into parliament and back

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Since the end of the military dictatorship the state has used fascist forces against demonstrations and protests. Since the crisis this collaboration has intensified, which resulted in Golden Dawn's ascent from a militant Nazi-squad to a parliamentary force. After the murder of the hip-hop artist and left-wing activist Pavlos Fyssas, the state curbed their influence again.

The election success of Golden Dawn in May and June 2012 was preceded by three years of state propaganda. After the uprising of December 2008 and facing the onslaught of the crisis, those in power intensified their support of fascist forces. They wanted to be able to enforce 'necessary' measures, based on the question: who do the streets belong to? With the onset of the crisis the streets have become spaces of class struggle, spaces of uncontrollable protest, strikes, demonstrations, riots and assemblies. This terrain had to be reconquered.

While many people of the radical left lived in an elevated mood of euphoria during the months after the uprising in December 2008, the (deep) state had already started to prepare its response. As early as December, demonstrations in some Greek cities were attacked by an alliance of para-state groups, cops and residents. In the port town of Patras on 9th of January 2009 a coalition of extreme right groups, 'outraged' petty bourgeois representatives (amongst others a "Citizens' initiative against homeless Afghan refugees and the slumification of our area") and small entrepreneurs (mainly shop-owners) followed the plain clothes and riot police in order to chase protestors at the end of a demonstration. This mob had met right next to the local police headquarters and was lead by the former local chief of police, who is now an MP for the New Democracy party. This type of episode matched the general repressive strategy: shortly afterwards, arrested school students in Larissa (central Greece) were charged under the anti-terror law.

A local pilot scheme

Against this background the state advanced local pilot schemes, one of which was in the area of Agios Panteleimonas and the neighbouring Attiki-Square. A few hundred metres away was the Villa Amalias, which had been squatted in March 1990 and evicted in December 2012.¹ In the 1960s Agios Panteleimonas used to be an aspirational petty-bourgeois area, when Greek people moved en masse from the provinces to Athens and into the modern new-build housing estates. Since then many have moved into the richer suburbs and rent out their old flats - since the 1990s mostly to migrants from Asia, Africa and the Balkan states. Rents are relatively low.

At the beginning of 2009 the fascists started to collaborate more offensively with a local initiative against migrant criminality, homeless Afghans and so-called 'scum houses' in the area. The initiative primarily demanded a greater police presence.

Their protests obviously did not target the bars and brothels in the area, which have been organised crime enterprises for a long time. It was the opposite: the local mafia participated in the initiative. One of whom, who was at the same time a member of Golden Dawn, was arrested for two cases of murder in 2011. Despite this, the initiative was protected and supported by the police at all times, even the former Minister for Public Order once posed with the initiative in public.

Since 2009 there were frequent short pogroms against migrants in different areas of Athens, in which a few dozen Nazis participated, accompanied by media cameras and police. Despite the fact that these pogroms were orchestrated like theatre plays, they had their impact. The political 'winners' in public were the fascists, who were able to present themselves as an effective 'law enforcement agency' [Ordnungsmacht; guardian of public order] on the side of the petty bourgeoisie. A priest, who used to hand out free food and clothes to homeless migrants, was transferred to a different parish.

The state's answer to the uprising

During the uprising in December 2008, locals and migrants together expressed their anger towards cops, banks, and businesses. The multi-national proletarian violence threatened the system - at a time when the global crisis was starting to unfold. Furthermore, after the murder of Alexis, the police had lost legitimacy amongst large sections of the population. The state reacted on three levels: re-armament, intensified racism and support of the fascists. For example, the state created new motorbike police units, which then launched brutal attacks on demonstrations from May 2010. Secondly, the state redefined social questions as questions of public order, with a strong racist bias. The health minister called Athens town centre a 'hygiene bomb'. He declared homeless people, drug addicts and migrants residing in run-down houses to be responsible. The same minister alleged that the treatment of illegal migrants was the reason behind the miserable condition of the public health system and shortly before the election in May 2012 he ordered the arrest of (illegal) prostitutes, having accused them of infecting Greek clients with AIDS. The women were stigmatised through the publication of their photos on television and the internet. They were later acquitted in court. This state racism culminated in summer 2012 in Operation Xenios Zeus, in which thousands of migrants were controlled and harassed by the police.

In order to understand the third level, the collaboration between state and fascists, a short historical retrospective is necessary: since the 1980s Greece's economy has been losing its competitiveness, leading to a decline in exports. To counteract this, since the 1990s the state adopted two strategies: the financing of huge infrastructure projects with EU money and massive credit expansion in order to support companies, mass consumption and housing construction. Both strategies reached an impasse during the Greek debt crisis. In addition, since the collapse of the eastern Bloc many workers from the bankrupt and totally wrecked national economies of Eastern Europe migrated to Greece, a country which, before then, had

hardly experienced any migration. The massive decline in wages in the construction sector, tourism and agriculture was not a 'natural' result of this migration, as some left (and right-) wing positions rather simplistically put it. Neither was it true that an 'unorganised' state existed without a (proper) migration politics, as some positions maintain even today. In contrast, it was the systematic illegalisation and the subsequent organised violence against migrant workers, which led to rapidly dwindling wages. The 'internal devaluation' of labour, which now affects the entire working class, had its origins in those years. The entire scope of the defeat of the (working) class and its widening divisions only reveal themselves now.

Initially there had been more militant workers' struggles against privatisation and broader protests against education reform. After this first round of protests the process of de-industrialisation was intensified. The promise that all Greeks could become part of the middle-class to a certain extent defused these conflicts. The credit expansion was an attempt to fulfil this promise, but the basis of it was the exploitation of the migrant workforce whose miserable wages kept the only booming sectors of recent years running: construction, tourism, and agriculture.

During these 'golden years' of the Greek economic miracle, Greek fascism was re-shaped socially and by the state. Organised crime grew significantly during these years - and merged with parts of the state, first of all with the police. By forging links with the state the small and medium mafia structures were not only able to secure and expand their business, they were also legitimised in society. These social subjects, who symbolised the promise of wealth and 'social ascent' during the last two decades turned Golden Dawn - a para-state mafia group - into a parliamentary force after the elections in 2012 and into the 'long arm' of the ruling class.

Who do the fascists address?

The fascists don't try to convince wider parts of society of their 'innovative' political proposals, their arguments or cultural values. They neither have an attractive ideology, nor did Golden Dawn set up charity structures, like, for example, Hamas. Their public food distribution - obviously only to 'Greek' people - or their announcement to organise child nurseries only for Greeks were merely symbolic actions. Other announcements, such as the restrictions of migrant children in nurseries, were ridiculous and atrocious and triggered immediate resistance by teachers' associations and trade unions. When the fascists wanted to donate blood 'only to Greeks' the hospital nurses' union and the doctors' associations immediately intervened. Such positions provoked the outrage of democratic 'citizens'.

The rise of the fascists is explained far more by the common interests with the ruling class and a section of the small business class and landowners, those e.g. that rent out their flats to migrants or exploit their labour. Those that exploit illegal labour and discipline with violence have common interests with the mafia structures. These often offer protection services. Physical assaults on striking agricultural labourers or single migrant waged-workers also took place in the 'golden years', they've just

increased sharply during the crisis. Now you need thugs to deal with tenants who are defaulting on their rent or owe debts or to evict a flat. Bosses are increasingly getting help from fascists or mafia-types to deal with conflicts with their workers e.g. due to outstanding wages. (This was the case with the strawberry pickers in Manolada.) Mafia control of the illegal and migrant sectors is slowly spreading out to the whole labour market and today, threatens the whole class.

The fascists are watchdogs

In opinion polls before the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, support for Golden Dawn was at around 12%, and growing. Afterwards that fell for a short time to around 6-7% and since then it's climbed again to around 10% - even though in the meantime, the media have turned against them. That's neither a reason for panic or reassurance. The fascists have a limited election potential and can't go beyond their state-given function. But there exactly lies their danger: the systemic role of fascists aims to spread fear and discipline amongst the working class. They could also be used for a 'strategy of tension.'

There are lots of voters, members and active sympathisers of Golden Dawn in the police force. In the last elections up to 50% of the cops in Athens voted for the fascists. Today's cops were shaped by the social development of the 90s, they were the leading organs of the brutal illegalisation of migrant labour. In addition to a shared ideology, there's the fact of a long term collaboration. The police have known the paramilitary fascist groups for a long time through their common attacks against demonstrations.

The extent to which the upper echelons of the police were involved with the fascists was revealed after the murder of Pavlos and the subsequent legal repression: some regional police chiefs were arrested, the two highest level police officials in the country had to resign, a further eight high-up officials were demoted, which included the heads of 'Special Branch', 'Organised Crime' and 'Explosives'.

But the winds had already changed prior to the murder. The international press had condemned the racist violence in Greece. The US Foreign Minister gave out a travel warning because of the neo-Nazi threat. In October 2012 CNN reported the violence against Africans in Athens and the 15 anti-fascists that were arrested and tortured by the cops. Racist police violence in particular was problematised even more: a backpacker from South Korea was beaten up by a street patrol in Athens and racially abused; a tourist from the Netherlands was beaten up in Chania and arrested; a professor from India, a guest of the economics university in Athens, was arrested in front of the university building because he didn't have his passport on him. The respective ambassadors wrote letters of protest, and the Greek government came under pressure.

Since winter 2012, the Greek media have also increasingly reported the 'bad' sides of Golden Dawn: photos showing Nazi salutes at demonstrations, photos of their tattoos and National Socialist symbols etc. became more frequent. For the first time,

newspapers close to the government also published shallow articles about possible criminal activities of the party or some of its members. The Greek EU Presidency in 2014 is not supposed to be disturbed by fascists and during the European and local elections in May 2014 the fascists are not supposed to be too successful.

Both are classic protest elections. Disappointed New Democracy voters could vote these nationalist lumpen-figures with their Nazi tattoos and their offensive, paranoid view into the European parliament. In the second round of mayoral elections in Athens, a Golden Dawn candidate could stand against the Syriza candidate. Can a metropolitan tourist city like Athens have an extreme-right mayor, who, amongst other things, beat up a female MP from KKE (Communist Party of Greece) live on TV? These discussions also lead to some reactions by the police, who up until now had not reacted. Now, every now and again, a fascist is arrested - but there still aren't any further consequences.

State anti-fascism

After the murder of Pavlos Fyssas the state began to actively oppose Golden Dawn and portray themselves as the better 'anti-fascists'. It's no surprise that the state should act against the fascists who are the 'political children' of the Greek state of emergency - what was initially surprising was the reason for the state's reaction being the murder of a left-wing rapper. Between January 2012 and April 2013 four people were murdered in racially motivated attacks and over 135 people were injured. That didn't trigger any state and media anti-fascist response. But the murder of Pavlos happened around the same time as two other important events.

Attack on the institutional left: First there was an organised attack by Golden Dawn on the night of the 12th of September 2013 in the port area of Perama. About 50 people with truncheons went to attack KKE and PAME members who were flyposting close to the shipyard, amongst whom was also the chairperson of the metal workers union. Perama is an area with very high unemployment and a stronghold of the KKE and their union, PAME. The open attack on a civil, parliamentary party like the KKE shows how much Golden Dawn over-estimated their strength.

Attack on the institutional right: On the 15th September Golden Dawn members and parliamentary members marched to the yearly rally for the victims of the civil war (1946-49) and disturbed it. The event is an important memorial event for the political right in Greece. When the mayor of New Democracy from Meligala,² was reading out his speech, the fascists violently insulted him and took over the event. After that the mayor left the rally with other local dignitaries. The police didn't intervene. It was a demonstration of power for the Nazis.

The murder of Pavlos Fyssas happened on the 17th September on a busy main street in the suburb of Keratsini near Piraeus. Here, police were also present and didn't intervene. It was a targeted and coordinated attack.

With the attack on KKE and the demonstration of strength on the memorial day celebrated by the traditional right, Golden Dawn showed that they now saw themselves as a real party, a party which claims hegemony on the political right and which openly attacks their enemies. The murder showed that the fascists felt invincible. Lots of cadres mistook the space which was given to them by the state institutions as an expression of their own strength and openly flaunted their arrogance and violence. From the point of view of the state, the danger of the fascists getting out of control wasn't just confined to the streets.

On the 22nd October parliament stopped the state financing of Golden Dawn. All parties were in agreement to this, including Syriza. Currently the General Secretary Michaloliakos, some parliamentary members and other high-ranking members are in jail. The main charge against them was 'building a criminal organisation', because Golden Dawn had recently more intensively tried to capture sectors of organised (and state controlled) crime. The ruling right in the form of New Democracy had pushed through an extremely neoliberal agenda, they no longer needed a fascist party as justification to move even further to the right. So they attacked Golden Dawn, which they originally built up themselves. And there are also alternatives for the 'deep state' in the meantime in case it should need parliamentary reserves or militant street structures against a possible movement from below. There's a lot of potential to use eligible people through the police, military, security firms, organised criminals and within the right-wing scene.

Attacks against the left

Already in August 2012 occupied houses and social centres were being evicted. Since spring 2013 the ban on self-organised open-air concerts and solidarity parties was enforced by police operations. On the one hand this is aimed at destroying the social structures of the anti-authoritarian scene and on the other hand it targets the self-organised survival structures of the migrant communities. A few days after the murder and the first raids against the fascists, the pace of action against the left was also stepped up. The judiciary found ten activists who had been part of the struggle against a planned gold mine in Chaldikik (in northern Greece) guilty of 'building a criminal organisation'. In the course of this trial it was revealed that telephone conversations between local inhabitants, activists, journalists and local Syriza representatives had been tapped by the police. Police presence in the centre of Athens and immigration controls have increased. Five unofficial, self-financed mosques in Agios Panteleimonas were shut down - spaces where migrants from Asia were also doing a Greek language course.³ Soon, proceedings will begin against the arson attack of Marfin Bank that happened during the general strike on May 5th 2010 in which five bank employees were killed. According to the defence team of the single defendant from the anti-authoritarian scene, there is no real evidence against him. In November the occupation of the former public TV station (ERT) building, which had lasted several months, was evicted. The closure was the first mass redundancy within the public sector.

Polarisation of society and "extremism" theory

The simultaneous advance 'against the right and left' in the name of the state's doctrine against extremism, together with a crass civil war rhetoric, is supposed to delegitimise any political praxis (strikes, demos, protests) that comes from below. In Greece this doctrine comes from the close circle of President Samaras' advisers. Some of these advisers have a right-wing history as members of Diktyo (Network 21). This was a 90s organisation of patriotic intellectuals, professors, journalists, lawyers, secret service staff and politicians. New Democracy continues its' swing to the right: firstly the recently appointed health ministers, Georgiadis and Makis Voridis, both of whom were previously ministers of the political party, Laos, were, in the 80s, like Michaloliakos, the General Secretary of Golden Dawn, members of the youth wing of the National Political Union (Epen), which was a far-right party that supported the dictatorship in Greece.

Since the 2012 elections, the representatives of right-wing, nationalist and imperialist wings, as well as those in the deep state, feature in the governmental parties New Democracy and Pasok. They have advanced to the forefront of the party organisations.

Throughout the 90s they were shaped by the war in the Balkans, cooperation with Milosevic, support of the PKK and Ocelan and the antagonistic relationship with Turkey, with which they've always been on the brink of war. They undertake their neoliberal and authoritarian management of the crisis without any social compromises. The 'liberal' factions of the parties such as the former President Papandreou have been sidelined. Only Syriza, as well as disappointed Pasok voters still address the 'centre'. The ruling parties no longer need the support of the 'middle strata'; in the current social polarisations they opt for law and order and the sharpening of social divisions. On his trip to Italy in October, Samaras said there were 'as many illegal immigrants in Greece as unemployed people', in other words, 1.3 million.

Confronting the fear!

Through its 'new' politics, the state is becoming stronger and better prepared to implement their kind of security policy, public order and new austerity measures. It's not only society in general affected by the crisis who have internalised the fear and terror, but also politicised groups and people. The fundamental insecurity has recently extended even further. In order to be able to proceed against state-mediated confusion and despair, we should first of all make clear the real political meaning of the events: the political rise of the fascists to parliamentary power and their (short-term?) dip is only a part of state armament and the growing power of the mafia structure. The fascists are overseen and dependent on the state for their financing as well as their illegal transactions being tolerated. The political dominance of these common material interests becomes apparent in today's migration politics, new refugee camps, drowned migrants and general social polarisation!

State anti-fascism protects the para-state structures within the army and police. Sooner or later it will turn against working class-oriented projects and struggles. There are already signs of this happening. The media portray the anti-fascist struggle on the streets as identitarian conflicts between the anti-authoritarian scene and the neo-Nazis. Left analyses reduce the explanation of the increasing power of the Greek fascists to that fact that the confusion and impoverishment of people pushed them into the hands of the fascists. They also insinuate that the poor and uneducated are more likely to become fascists and by implication, that those that are relatively rich and educated, and who are less affected by the crisis would turn towards the left. By advocating this opinion, one comes to the dangerous conclusion that anti-fascism is the task of a state-financed left. The (self) limitation of anti-fascist struggles to identitarian politics in the framework of a left-radical scene quickly leads to marginalisation, which opens the door to police repression and media defamation. That's even more the case for individual terrorist actions, like the shooting of three Nazis in front of a local Golden Dawn office, in which two of them died. Regardless of who the perpetrators were and their motives, this action was useful only to the cops and the repression-apparatus. Left-wing as well as pacifist ideas that ultimately hope that the constitutional state will take on the fascists are naive. They have become trapped by the 'extremism doctrine' of the state.

Nowadays, proletarian anti-fascist violence in any case is necessary, especially in those places where left-wing activists or even just the presence of left-wingers, are hindered or threatened by fascists. We can't allow the fascists the monopoly on violence.

Fascist and police attacks on migrants is an attack on the whole working class. Therefore, the struggle against anti-fascist structures is not just a humanitarian question, but also a class question. Anti-fascism must be a part of the wider class struggle. The class character of the crisis must become just as clear as the fundamental refusal of national unity to 'rescue the homeland'.

This type of anti-fascism also offers new possibilities, to establish contacts, and tackle individualisation and the atmosphere of crisis. Multinational friendship circles of youth and school students, new workers under new conditions, the disappointed left... can come together. The potential for such a cooperation shows up in the positive reactions to anti-fascist initiatives and street actions that are supported (verbally at least) by not directly involved by-standers. The building up of mutual confidence strengthens the feeling of collective power. Only the unity of the unemployed, workers and the poor can reclaim the public sphere and get rid of the everyday fear.

Anti-fascism is class struggle!

The network of fascists and mafia structures

In the last year, the tabloid paper, 'Pro Thema' has supported Golden Dawn. Its famous report about the granny who was 'safeguarded' and escorted to the cash point by the Nazis quickly turned out to be a fake: the woman was the mother of a local Golden Dawn member. The entrepreneur Pallis holds 40 per cent of the shares of this newspaper, a supporter of the fascists. He is wanted for tax fraud and involvement in the arms trade. He is accused of having imported 4,000 fire-arms and of financing Golden Dawn. The imported weapons were not meant to supply Golden Dawn, as many journalists had assumed. They were meant to be sold to organised crime, particularly for the armament of security firms protecting Greek ships travelling the Arabian Sea, and similar operations of private armies. Given the fact that fascists are also involved in this type of business it is often difficult to distinguish them from organised crime. Pallis cooperates with Victoras Restis, a former bank owner and ship fleet operator who is in jail for tax evasion and money laundering. Restis was likely one of the main financiers of Golden Dawn and in contact with Dimitris Giovanidis, the former police chief of Nikaia, a working class district in the west of Athens, who is now also in prison. In 2009 a Pakistani migrant was tortured to death under Giovanidis' command. The cops and fascists collaborated openly in Nikaia. This was the second state pilot scheme to support Golden Dawn. Its' local cell had recruited a lot of hooligans. The murderers of Fyssas came from the Nikaia and the Perama cell. Cops were arrested not only in Nikaia, but also in the place of the first pilot project Agios Panteleimonas, where the local chief of police was locked up. In the houses and bank accounts of the accused, large sums of money and other evidence of their activities were found: fascists and cops engaged in a systemic devaluation of the area for the sake of real estate speculation and protection racketeering, which extorted money from migrant petty business and street vendors. The Restis-Pallis-Giovanidis-Nikaia complex reveals the shape of Greek mafia capitalism.

Footnotes:

[1] The 'Villa Amalias' originated in the politicised punk-scene, which brought radical cultural questions into the anti-authoritarian political scene. Since then the Villa developed into a culture/social centre, hosting concerts, theatre, public meetings, bookshops, but was also centre of more offensive anti-fascist work feared by the Nazis. The Villa was a left institution known across the whole of Athens. During these decades thousands of young people passed through the Villa and became (indirectly) politicised.

[2] In Meligala in September 1944, immediately after the withdrawal of German occupying troops, the communist-dominated resistance organisation EAM-ELAS executed between 800 and 1400 members of the right-wing security battalion and other groups that had collaborated with the Germans. Thus, Meligala became a place of pilgrimage for the Greek right-wing. It takes place yearly as a 'festive of hatred.' At the same time, this festival serves as a demonstration of power of the governing political right: for the patriotic and royal anti-communists from the post-war period up until the onset of the military dictatorship in 1967, and then for the upper hierarchy of the military regime, and after the fall of the junta, for the right-wing New Democracy party.

[3] Athens is probably the only European capital without an official mosque, the building of which has been postponed for decades because of pressure from local church organisations, politicians and inhabitants.

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