

Greek government parties, opposition call joint demonstration

By Christoph Dreier
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Greek unions, political parties, councilors and many organizations have issued calls for a protest demonstration on January 19 against the fascist party Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn). Tens of thousands are expected to attend in Syntagma Square in the heart of Athens. Smaller solidarity actions have been announced in several European cities, including London, Barcelona and Paris.

The protest organizers are responding to widespread concern over the growth of the fascist threat in Greece. Millions of Greeks are outraged and disgusted by the vile propaganda of Chrysi Avgi and its repeated, brutal attacks on political opponents, homosexuals and immigrants.

The alliance calling the protest has no intention of conducting a serious struggle against the fascists and the Greek state, however. Instead the demonstration is being used to rally support for the government's right-wing policies and forge fresh alliances for more social attacks.

In addition to government representatives, the appeal has been supported by various pseudo-left groups, such as the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) and the Greek Communist Party (KKE). These groups share responsibility for the witch-hunt of immigrants and the rise of the extreme right. Their "alliance against the right" will only serve to strengthen such forces.

The fascists have been able to gain influence in Greece because the mass of the population has been driven into unprecedented social destitution, while resistance by workers has been systematically sabotaged and oppressed.

Nowhere is the crisis of European capitalism as palpable as in Greece. While narrow layers of Greek millionaires, international bankers and speculators have enriched themselves in princely fashion, poverty is

widespread on the streets of Athens. Unemployment, hunger and lack of medical care dominate the lives of broad sections of the population. Five austerity programs dictated by the EU have plunged Greece into a massive social crisis.

Such horrendous levels of inequality are incompatible with basic democratic rights. As during the Weimar Republic, authoritarian tendencies are rising inside the state apparatus. In Weimar Germany, Chancellor Brüning governed through emergency ordinances, which were then retroactively approved by parliament. In Greece it is the stipulations of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund which have undermined parliamentary control.

The demonstration on January 19 is supported by the very parties responsible for this development. The social-democratic PASOK, which has led the City Council in Athens and supports the demonstration, has been in government since October 2009, backing every cut and attack on social conditions. Since last June it has intensified this policy, as part of a coalition government with the conservative New Democracy (ND) and the Democratic Left (DIMAR), which also supports the demonstration.

The coalition government's own campaign against immigrants has played directly into the hands of the fascists. Its "Xenios Zeus" campaign mobilized tens of thousands of police who have arrested 65,767 (non-white) people since August. 4,145 have so far been deported on charges of lacking valid papers.

Security forces have also been increasingly deployed against striking workers. In June police brutally broke up a nine-month-long strike by workers at a steel plant near Athens. Piraeus port workers have been attacked by security forces, and peaceful demonstrators in Syntagma Square are regularly dispersed by police

using tear gas and batons.

The same police force is an important pillar of the fascist movement. An estimated 60 percent of police voted for Chrysi Avgi in the last election. Many eyewitnesses have reported that police have remained idle during fascist attacks, and local residents who accuse immigrants of criminal acts have been directed by the police to Chrysi Avgi. In addition, the police have repeatedly arrested, humiliated and tortured anti-fascist demonstrators.

The various pseudo-left tendencies supporting the protest march play a particularly pernicious role. Organizations such as SYRIZA, the KKE and the Cooperation of the Anti-Capitalist Left for the Overthrow (Antarsya) support large parts of the government program and have done all they could to smother workers' resistance.

The largest opposition party, SYRIZA, refused to stop the last austerity package by forcing new elections. It defends Greek membership of the EU and has assured the international banks that Greece will pay back its loans. On a number of occasions, the party has also demanded an increased police presence in local neighborhoods.

Together with the KKE and Antarsya, SYRIZA defends the unions, which work closely with the government and have systematically driven strikes and protests by workers into a dead end. Greece has seen dozens of 24-hour general strikes in recent years. Every strike was announced long in advance by the unions and was strictly limited. Such protests were completely ineffective and only served to demoralize workers.

This policy of the pseudo-left groups and unions has transformed the anger of certain social strata into political despair, creating a breeding ground for the fascists. Under conditions where workers are denied a progressive alternative to oppose social decline and degradation, Chrysi Avgi has been able to mobilize the dregs of society behind its fascist program.

The aim of the Alliance behind the demonstration on January 19 is to prevent an independent movement of workers and to re-align the population behind the state and its parties. It subordinates workers to forces which are moving ever faster to the right and suppressing social and democratic rights. This creates new openings for the fascists.

This is not just a consequence of the current

developments in Greece, but is rather a fundamental lesson of the 20th century. When intensifying class antagonisms and social tensions reach the boiling point, the bourgeoisie embraces authoritarian forms of rule, up to and including fascism. The only progressive way out of social disaster and to struggle against the danger of fascism is an independent working class movement based on a socialist perspective.

In 1936 the Stalinists suppressed the Spanish revolution and subordinated workers to bourgeois parties, in the name of the "People's Front" against fascism. In so doing they paved the way for Franco's victory. In Germany the SPD refused to co-operate in a united front with the German Communist Party to oppose Hitler, instead fueling the illusion that the Prussian police and the army would stop the Nazis. In this respect it was supported by the ultra-left policies of the Stalinist Communist Party.

Given the current social disaster and the role of the pseudo-left groups, the danger of fascism in Greece today is very real. This is why an independent movement of workers aimed at opposing both the fascist gangs and the government's social attacks is crucial.

Workers must free themselves from the influence of the trade unions and the pseudo-left groups and take the fight against the ultra-right into their own hands. Action committees should be formed to defend political meetings, immigrants and workers in neighborhoods against attacks by the fascists and the state apparatus.

This, however, is only the first step. The fascists can only be beaten with a socialist perspective that declares war on the capitalist system and fights for a workers government, dedicated to expropriating the banks and major corporations and employing wealth in the interest of all of society. This requires the building of a new party, which unites workers internationally in the struggle for a socialist program.

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