

Greek authorities release three fascist Golden Dawn deputies from custody

By Christoph Dreier
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Since the murder of the anti-fascist hip-hop musician Pavlos Fyssas, about two dozen members of the fascist Golden Dawn party have been arrested in Greece. Three of the five detained parliamentary deputies and four other members have now been set free, however, on condition that they not leave Greece pending their trials.

Those remaining in custody include the Golden Dawn Chairman Nikos Michaloliakos, his deputy Yiannis Lagos, policewoman Veta Popori, regional leader Giorgos Patelis, and Giorgos Roupakias, the confessed murderer. The remaining detainees are still being investigated to determine whether there are sufficient grounds to continue holding them in custody.

The Golden Dawn officials remaining in custody are suspected of being directly tied to Fyssas' murder. Police found three illegal firearms while arresting Michaloliakos, who is accused of forming a criminal association. Lagos spoke by phone with Roupakias immediately after the murder and then called Michaloliakos.

Those freed are Nikos Michos, who is considered a close confidant of Michaloliakos; Ilias Panagiotaros; and Ilias Kasidiaris, the alleged head of Golden Dawn's security service. Kasidiaris still faces another separate trial for assaulting a deputy of the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE) in front of television cameras during a talk show in the summer of 2012.

After the court decision yesterday, the fascists appeared confident and aggressive. Upon leaving the courtroom, they insulted journalists present and sought to intimidate them. Michos called out: "You will only stop us with bullets. We will go to the end. You will hear from us."

On the way out of the courtroom, Kasidiaris punched one journalist's camera and kicked another in the legs.

While he was being transported to jail, Michaloliakos cried out to a group of supporters: "Long live Greece! Long live Golden Dawn!"

It remains unclear when any trials will take place, and it could take months for a decision to be made. Given the preliminary ruling letting several Golden Dawn officials go free, and Golden Dawn's close links to the police and judiciary, it seems clear that the authorities are seeking to avoid imposing significant sentences.

Legally, the release of the Golden Dawn deputies is difficult to justify. Kasidiaris, whose aggressive behavior has already been broadcast for all to see on Greek national television, based his entire defense on the claim that Golden Dawn does not possess paramilitary units. His assertion runs in the face of manifest evidence to the contrary by dozens of witnesses, the discovery of weapons, and the findings of state surveillance of Golden Dawn.

The court's decision to release leading Golden Dawn officials makes clear that the government's aim was to curb, but not to end Golden Dawn's criminal activities. A broad network of links remains between the state apparatus, the ruling parties, and the fascists.

Three years ago the conservative New Democracy (ND) and the social democratic PASOK parties sat in a joint coalition government with the far-right LAOS party. Many of Golden Dawn's current cadres were recruited from LAOS, or directly from ND.

Kasidiaris' lawyer, Pavlos Saraki, was an ND member until being expelled from the party on Tuesday. Reports now indicate that Golden Dawn was financed not only by wealthy ship owners, but also by PASOK and ND.

According to witnesses, the party's 3,000-strong paramilitary force is trained by high-ranking members of the army and its special units. Numerous videos and

photos demonstrate how police used Golden Dawn thugs against demonstrators and then protected them afterwards. An estimated 60 percent of police voted for Golden Dawn in the last election.

The mass demonstrations and protests that spread across the country after Fyssas' murder threatened to discredit the entire ruling elite and lead to a revolutionary confrontation of the workers with Greece's reactionary state apparatus. The ruling class decided to rein in Golden Dawn temporarily in order to strengthen the state and maintain order. While they felt compelled to jail key figures inside Golden Dawn, powerful sections of the ruling elite are defending them and seeking to secure either lenient treatment or their outright release.

The struggle against fascism in Greece cannot be left to any faction of the ruling class or its existing political parties. Greek fascism has grown because of the social devastation and desperation caused by the austerity agenda of the European Union (EU) and the Greek state. A struggle against Golden Dawn can only be based on the mobilization of the working class against the EU, austerity, and Greece's entire political establishment.

In particular, as the recent release of Golden Dawn deputies shows, the support given by pseudo-left parties to proposals for a state ban on Golden Dawn does not strengthen, but blocks a real struggle by the working class against fascism. It leaves the initiative in the hands of a state that has close political and organizational ties to fascism, and that—if granted the power to ban political organizations—will use it against working people.

In a speech at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, Samaras again stressed that the government must take action not only against Golden Dawn, but also against any “extreme opposition” calling for Greek withdrawal from NATO, the euro, or the EU.

This is a clear indication that the Greek government and the EU will respond to political opposition in the working class by seeking to legalize it. Calls for a state ban of Golden Dawn—a measure that the state would then seize upon to seek the power to ban and prosecute working class opposition to the EU's austerity policies—must therefore be opposed.

The Greek government is preparing for violent social

conflict. The planned mass layoffs in the public sector have already met enormous resistance. Nine universities have closed because their directors are protesting the dismissal of nearly 40 percent of administrative staff.

On Tuesday, health workers decided to join the ongoing protests against layoffs. On Kanningos Square in Athens on Thursday, hundreds of public workers marched against the cuts. On the same day, a union-affiliated institute predicted an increase in the country's unemployment rate to 34 percent by 2016.

In this situation the “troika”—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Commission and European Central Bank (ECB)—has given the Greek government an ultimatum of one month to enforce agreed spending cuts. In addition to mass layoffs, the troika is demanding further cuts in the coming year. Otherwise, the troika threatens to keep holding back a tranche of aid credits of over a billion euros originally planned for July.

Greece's pseudo-left parties are supporting the Greek government's reactionary role in relation to Golden Dawn. The largest opposition party, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) has fully backed the state apparatus. Its leader, Alexis Tsipras, described the arrest of Golden Dawn members as a sign of the “health of democracy” in Greece, claiming that only a “small minority” of police support the fascists.

In the face of the release of the fascist officials and the uncovering of the close links between the state apparatus and Golden Dawn, Tsipras praised the Greek justice system. At a meeting in Brussels, he said: “We are confident that the judiciary will do their job impartially.”

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