

# Greece: unite the struggles and bring down the government

Since Wednesday 25 May the central squares in Athens and other Greek cities have been occupied by protesters. ANDROS PAYIATSOS, from Xekinima, the Greek section of the Committee for a Workers' International, spoke to the Socialist.

## Can you describe the youth movement?

This wave of occupations is obviously a response to the developments in Spain, which in turn were influenced by the mass movements in Tunisia and Egypt. This shows the strength of internationalism that exists.

The occupation is also a response to the conditions faced by the youth. The Greek TUC says the real unemployment figure is 22%. Youth unemployment is about double that. The basic take home wage for new entrants is about €520 a month net, which is a starvation wage.

This movement is quite a powerful development but it is still unclear how it will go forward.

In Syntagma Square, on the day it began, we estimate that there were 50,000 people, including those who did not stay for the whole duration, as it lasted from 6pm until 2am. Workers with families can't stay all that time. There were massive demonstrations in about 15 Greek cities, Thessalonica, Patras, Volos and so on.

As well as the youth you have pensioners and workers; they all try to contribute. It seems that the basis has been laid for the occupations to continue in the two main cities.

There are very big assemblies in which, although they last up to five hours, a huge number participate. Committees to take care of technical aspects - food, water, Wi-Fi connections, etc - are being established. And the first tents have been erected in the square.

## In Spain we saw a certain antipathy towards trade unions and political parties. Is this also present among the Greek youth?

Like in Spain, the unwillingness to involve the trade unions and any political parties is very strong. But we think it is also very temporary.

We believe that, once this develops into a movement, the need to give it mass dimensions to make it effective will be obvious. And then the youth will have to appeal to the working class, to the trade unions. This will be an appeal mainly to the rank and file because the trade union leaders are hated, and also to the rank and file of the left parties because of the hostility towards the left parties.

Xekinima members are playing a role in the occupation coordinating committees in Athens and Thessalonica.

One of our central demands, both in the assemblies and in the material that we are producing and circulating, is that we want the workers to come; we want all the people who are on strike to finish their strikes in the squares and stay there.

If the electricity workers have a 48-hour strike, for example, after their demo we would like them to come to the square to both provide and receive support and solidarity.

We are confident that these tactics will have an appeal and I'm also confident that the majority in the assemblies will support these ideas when we raise them.

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## With the Greek government discussing further cuts and privatisation anger must be boiling up?

Yes. The Greek government is currently agreeing the second memorandum with the 'Troika', the IMF, the EU and the ECB. This actually means that after one year of applying their policies, which were really barbaric, destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, they came to the conclusion that their policies have failed.

Last year there were four waves of attacks. The second memorandum means more attacks. So people are desperate. The speed of events in Greece is amazing. Movements spring up, but because they have no leadership who can provide a programme and a strategy for the struggle, they don't last long.

And then you have reaction coming, like the fascist attacks of two weeks ago. This can only be understood if one sees Greek society as a series of convulsions. People are hugely angry but also hugely desperate. They try to find a way out.

## What has been the response to the fascist attacks?

First of all I have to say that what took place was shocking. For about four days the Nazis, not just far-right populists, were chasing any immigrant they saw in the streets, hitting them with knives and with everything they could. They would enter immigrant shops and would destroy everything; it was like a pogrom. The police were watching and doing nothing. Any Greek who tried to protest to the police was, in essence, handed over to the fascists to be beaten and hospitalised.

This really shocked the left. The mass parties of the left have always underestimated the dangers of fascism. Xekinima always stressed that the conditions which will be created and the anger, desperation and frustration can lead to an increase of racism and fascism. This development shows that you have to fight the fascists from the very beginning, even if they are small forces.

Now the problem is there has not yet been any serious answer to the fascists by the left parties or by the unions. Unfortunately, despite proposals by Xekinima and five well-attended meetings, the various left groups were unwilling to agree united activity. It's ridiculous, scandalous. However the fight has to be given against the fascists.

The far right have tried to intervene in the occupations. They tried to take advantage of the confusion which exists to promote nationalist slogans. But the youth and Xekinima members took up and answered the fascists' political arguments. It seems that they have retreated from this movement now and seem to be attacking it instead.

## What way forward does Xekinima propose?

There have been very many important struggles recently. Bus workers had strike activity over three months. But they were defeated. It was a sell-out by their leadership. And then there was the fantastic occupation of the council hall in Athens by workers on temporary contracts. After four weeks that was also sold out. This adds to the frustration.

We have had the development of movements, such as non-payment of the road tolls, characteristic of the first three months of the year. But they also died down because the mass parties of the left did not put their forces behind them.

And now we have this occupation movement which is again spontaneous from below. Unfortunately, the KKE, the Greek Communist Party, has come out against it. Synaspismos, the other main left party, also fails to provide direction.

We've had many strikes in many different sectors. We've also had nine general strikes up until now, with the tenth planned for 21 June. There is a continuous strike movement; the youth can see the power of the working class.

But at the same time they understand that this kind of strike activity is not sufficient to solve the problem. It requires more. General strikes are called every two or three months. What is demanded is a more determined strike activity which could paralyse the government and essentially, as we put forward in the occupation assemblies, bring down the government.

Although there is a lot of confusion people understand that the country is ruled by what everybody in Greece now calls 'thieves and liars'. The slogan 'they must go' is widespread.

But this is not the same as understanding that to bring down the government requires organised struggle. So in Xekinima we explain that the policies of this pro-big business government are destroying every-

thing - no exaggeration. If we want these policies to go, we must bring down this government.

A spontaneous movement like these occupations is not enough. You have to get it well organised, you have to link it with the working class; you have to link it with the strikes. You have to link it with the demand to bring down the government and oppose any government formed by New Democracy, the traditional capitalist party.

And of course at the same time we also raise the rest of our political demands, including refusing to pay the debt, nationalisation of the banks, linked to our argument that the only way out for the Greek working people and youth is by breaking with capitalism.

Previously we called for the left parties to collaborate to bring down the government. This was when the combined left was receiving about 25-30% in the polls and the idea of the left taking power could be seen as realistic. Now, not only the youth, but also a big section of the working class, is very unhappy with the left.

In recent polls 45% said they would vote for no one if elections were held. In Greece the abstention rate is 20-25% normally.

But when people ask if you get rid of the Pasok government who will replace it, we answer that we, the youth, the workers, the activists can replace the present rulers. On the basis of this movement, on the basis of the representative committees of this movement, also supported by big sections of the rank and file of the left (and even some sections of the leaderships) we can provide the basis and the structures of a new power that will represent the working masses and replace the 'thieves' in parliament. This goes down well.

## Postscript

The general meeting on Friday 27 May agreed almost unanimously to link to the developing strike waves and invite all striking workers to the Square; to declare that the occupation would continue until the fall of the present government and to refuse to recognise the sovereign debt as the people's debt.

On Sunday 29 May one of the biggest mass mobilisations ever took place in Syntagma Square. At any time 50-70,000 were present, but the total number of people who passed from the square is estimated by Xekinima to be in the region of 200,000!

## The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

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'G8 Dégage (get out)!'

*Alex Lecoq, Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI France)*