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The Greek general strike of 19 and 20 October

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Description:

The 48-hour political strike of 19 and 20 October was another highlight of the class struggle, clearly expressing the intention of the workers and the middle classes to overthrow the government. On Wednesday, October 19, about 400-500,000 demonstrators took to the streets in Athens and a total of around one million in Greece as a whole. The demonstrations were the largest since the fall of the junta in 1974 and unambiguously demonstrate the enormity of social discontent, along with the determination of the working masses to fight against and overturn the barbaric capitalist policies of the government, the bankers, and the luminaries of the Troika. The general strike had been prepared in the best manner by strikes in various industries and by the occupations of ministries, town halls and other public buildings.

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This made it difficult for the Government to maintain "normal" economic life and state administration. It was quite obvious how sharp the conscious breach expressed by the the protesters with the prevailing policy had become, how deep the pent-up anger that erupted. From the square occupations in June the strikers turned to occupations of public administration buildings, thus indicating a qualitatively new situation. However, there was no occupation of firms and workplaces. The mass meeting the next day, October 20, at Syntagma Square was also enormous, with some 100,000 striking workers. Still, it was not sufficient to prevent Parliament from approving the 41 articles in the new bill. This list of measures will have a severe and intolerable impact on the lives of millions of workers, pensioners and unemployed.

Once again the protests were met with a brutal police crackdown. All the militants of the movement should offer their warmest condolences to the family and comrades of Dimitris Kotsaridis who was assassinated by police repression at a demonstration, organized against the government of social cannibalism and blind obedience in the service of national and international capitalism. The overthrow of the existing system and the victory of the workers will be the only effective retaliation for the loss of this fighter, and it will honor his memory.

The leaderships of the two leftist parties represented in Parliament contributed decisively to the inability of the strike mobilizations to keep the aggressive policy of the capitalists from proceeding. The Chairman of the left-reformist alliance SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, denounced the conspiracy of silence on the part of government with which they covered their policy. However, he limited his oppositional stance to the call for elections. Thus, he was not only far behind the needs of the huge majority of the working class, but also behind their willingness to be involved in a radical social upheaval.

Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that the KPG (KKE) and its trade union front PAME took the worst and most negative political stance during these events. On the day of the planned encirclement of Parliament the leadership of PAME seized the opportunity to make sure its contingent in the demonstration marched in front of Parliament and "encircled" it in such a way that the back of the demonstrators was turned toward the Parliament building. This was intended to protect Parliament from any possible radical and confrontational attitude on the part of other protesters. This goal was clear, though PAME was in contact with the other parts of the movement unions, associations and political and social organizations for the first time after many years. This has to be stressed since the PAME contingent is usually kept away from all other demonstrators in a completely sectarian manner. In fact, however, the contact in this particular case was meant to create a buffer, a guarantee for the normal functioning of parliamentary procedures. The KKE and PAME contingents, whose members appeared in full uniform, prevented all of the others from lining up in front of Parliament. Militants of the PAME used physical force and beat up members of several other contingents whom they considered "dangerous." And not satisfied simply with this, KKE and PAME went on to distort the facts in order to accuse those they physically assaulted of being "police agents" in the well-known Stalinist style.

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It's undeniable that at this crucial moment the KKE followed its own logic and belief, as if there is no movement except its own. Therefore, everybody who does not support the party is an enemy. At the same time the party gained badges of honor, due to its willingness to compromise and to its loyalty to the government and to the system as a whole. It did everything in its power to ensure that the encirclement of the Parliament was not a real siege, limiting the mobilization to an admittedly massive, but still peaceful and ultimately, therefore, harmless and ineffective protest based on traditional patterns. The KKE leadership is entirely fixated on the rules of the parliamentary system and is preparing the party forces for expected developments. It is not unlikely that in the coming weeks elections will be announced. If this is what happens, KKE would like to appear as the responsible party of the Left and as a reliable opposition that consistently refuses subversive and confrontational practices. This attitude will continue regardless of what government is ultimately created, the government organized by single party or a government of "national unity."

Because of such practices, PAME was denounced by thousands of activists who were involved in the mobilization. Nevertheless it has to be emphasized that this legitimate and basically correct political criticism of PAME cannot in any way justify the attack on the PAME contingent which was carried through with stones, boards, smoke bombs and Molotov cocktails by members of some groups that define themselves within the anti-authoritarian and anarchist spectrum. Anything that promotes the use of force within the working class movement is not acceptable, because it is not directed against the forces of repression. It has a destructive impact on the development of the movement itself. The result of these practices was, in fact, that an extraordinary manifestation of workers' anger dissipated inconclusively. The bourgeois propagandists took the opportunity to talk about a kind of civil war, and this deters some workers who are participating in such protests and demonstrations for the first time.

Some groups of the autonomous-anarchist current referred in their statements to the Stalinism of the KKE and tried to justify the violent attacks as a kind of public anger against the logic of PAME that attempts to hegemonize the entire movement. But these accusations can and should convince no one. In reality, these groups follow a similar logic when they commit acts of violence at every demonstration in a wholly arbitrary and uncontrolled fashion. In this way they inhibit the organized mass contingents from implementing their own plans. On the other hand, it is not correct to hastily denounce these groups as a camouflaged part of the security state apparatus, etc. It is undeniable that the anonymity of the autonomous-anarchist spectrum and the wearing of "hoods" on the street make them more susceptible to infiltration by police agents. Nevertheless, it is unacceptable to simply dismiss all these groups as police agents and quasi-governmental mechanisms. Furthermore, the block of people who started the attack on PAME was totally disorganized, without banners, and therefore its composition is unknown. The explanation presented by KKE and PAME, that disguised police provocateurs had planned the attack beforehand and then carried it out, is insufficient and does not lead to relevant political conclusions.

The real background to the emergence of such behaviors is a fetishism of violence as a means of resolving political conflicts. This fetishism finds fertile soil in a certain milieu, especially among the youth. It is a kind of fixation on violent behavior that is, in the final analysis, far from any political and organized forms of protest that could be really dangerous to the system. The fire of the Marfin Bank on 5 May 2010, when three bank employees were killed, is characteristic in this respect. Just the day before there was an attack on a teachers' contingent and on the following day attacks on KKE members and on district offices of the party in the style of a mafia feud. All this has nothing to do with anticapitalist struggle; quite the opposite.

Regardless of the media reports regarding who should be blamed for the physical altercations at Syntagma Square, there is no question that the logic of the KKE to organize "reasonable" and "peaceful" demonstrations without any prospect of an escalation, which is clearly against a mood in the movement that is prepared for a massive collision is deeply flawed. Equally, however, the tactic of uncontrolled violence must be condemned since it amounts to meaningless and purposeless destruction and pushes in a direction which is contrary to the goals of the workers' and popular movement. Even an explicit understanding of the police-style function that the PAME leadership exercised within the movement does not in any way justify the attacks with Molotov cocktails on striking PAME protesters. Such practices can only provoke disgust and outrage. The answer to the tactics of the KKE and PAME must be given by

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the movement itself in a political way, not by anonymous groups that claim to reflect the popular mood. However, it must also be noted that the orientation of the Communist Party to take over primary responsibility for the defense of civil institutions can only be destructive to the labor movement, in both the short and long term.

Despite all, and for various reasons, there was a lack of mass sentiment that would have seriously projected a storming of the Parliament or its actual encirclement during the two strike days. This was crucial, and ultimately made clear that the decisive spark did not exist. On Wednesday the strikers approached the fence and tore it down, but no large crowds were involved. On Thursday, more radical forms of struggle could barely be noticed. Nevertheless, only through such a radicalization of the mass mood can the logic of PAME, or of some of the anti-authoritarian autonomous groups that want to represent the movement as a whole, be overcome. What is needed in the coming weeks is a continuation of the massive occupation of public buildings (town halls, ministries, etc.) and the escalation of long-term strikes and mobilizations aimed at paralyzing production by a political general strike calling for the overthrow of the government.

In this sense, neither PAME nor any other group can claim the right to position itself "in the vanguard in front of the Parliament." Any serious proposal for the movement, its stance and tactics, must be based on political criteria and objectives, not on journalistic commentary from the outside. It will be of paramount importance to all anti-capitalist revolutionary forces in the near future to develop a current within the labor movement that attempts to promote the workers united front, attempting to become dominant during the next wave of strikes, demonstrations and occupations. This current will come into an irreconcilable conflict with the miserable policy of compromise and capitulation of the union bureaucracy, the logic of the military-police-in-the-movement as represented by PAME, and the fetishism of violence that characterizes certain groups from the autonomous-anarchist spectrum. What we need is a political workers' movement that will send the government, the bankers, the EU and the IMF to the trash heap, which will eventually overthrow bourgeois society paving the way for the socialist transformation of relations.

Unfortunately the ANTARSYA statement shows a certain lack of understanding regarding the real objectives of the KKE leadership. The united action and the united front of workers' movement must not be formed under conditions projected by PAME. The fighting that preceded the general strike has shown that this united front can and must emerge out of the essential qualitative development of the mass movement itself. The statement of the ANTARSYA Central Coordination Committee, in contrast, represents a retreat in the face of the policy pursued by the KKE leadership, and is therefore inadequate.

Athens, October 29th, 2011