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Greece

For an internationalist anti-war movement against national myths

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On the ongoing Greco-Turkish rivalry in the Mediterranean.

1. The current Greek-Turkish crisis in the Mediterranean is not the result of an alleged unilateral aggression and provocation by Turkey. Nor is it, in abstract, the result of the intensification of imperialist rivalries or the rival claims of the bourgeoisies of Greece and Turkey. The specific reason for the crisis has been the agreement of the Greek government with the dictator of Egypt in the context of a policy of the Greek bourgeoisie that aims to exclude the Turkish bourgeoisie from access to the - still controversial - wealth-producing resources of the SE Mediterranean. General pacifist propaganda, no matter how necessary it may be, is not enough in a period of dangerous war games. The dangerous belligerence of the Greek state must be revealed, which exposes the working class and the people to the risk of a catastrophic war for the interests of the capitalists.

2. Greece's main weapon in its attempt to exclude Turkey from the Mediterranean is the relative favor it currently enjoys within the Western capitalist bloc, on the part of the US and major EU powers (France, etc.), mainly due to the partial diplomatic turn of Turkey to Russia. Greece's clear goal is a continuous EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) between Greece and Cyprus, bordering the EEZs of its allies, Israel and Egypt to the east and Italy to the west, on a maritime map in which Turkey will have no place.

3. The Greek government has blown up the German-mediated dialogue since the July crisis, announcing a bilateral agreement with Egypt on a partial demarcation of the two countries' EEZs, which includes sea areas also claimed by Turkey and Libya. Turkey's new seismic surveys are a response to this unilateral action taken by Greece.

4. The seismic surveys of Oruç Reis are carried out at a very great distance from the Greek islands (it is indicative that they leave intact 90% of the EEZ claimed by Greece for the tiny island of Kastelorizo). Contrary to the nationalist criticism against the "alleged softness" of Mitsotakis, the Greek government has reacted to the Turkish surveys aggressively and dangerously, not only seeking the diplomatic isolation of Turkey but also binding international airspace over the area for ??aeronautical training and preparing a joint military exercise with the US Air Force, after having already performed a joint exercise with the French Navy. At the same time, the government demonstrates its determination by announcing the expansion of the territorial waters of Greece in the Ionian Sea, an announcement also made two years ago by Kotsias, SYRIZA's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time.

5. At the same time, the Greek government is utilizing refugees in a vulgar way. As soon as Turkey raised the issue of safe navigation and therefore rights at sea, the Greek government was cynical enough to set up the recent communication show with the "harassment" of Greek vessels by Turkish ones during the refugee rescue operation in Halki, just a few days after Greece has provoked international indignation for its criminal illegal maritime repatriations of refugees by boat.

6. The Greek government, together with the parliamentary parties and the media, are shouting against last year's Turkey-Libya memorandum for delimitation of the EEZ between the two states and denouncing the unilateral actions of the Erdogan government. They conceal, of course, the long and systematic aggressive actions taken by the Greek governments: the seismic surveys that Greece already conducted in 2008 in the disputed area where the current Turkish surveys are now carried out; the contacts with Cyprus and Israel for a continuous EEZ of the 3 states that would exclude Turkey, the negotiations with the Gaddafi government for demarcation with Libya, ignoring the Turkish claims ? the participation of Greece in the imperialist intervention in Libya and the talks with the new government, which followed the overthrow of Gaddafi aided by the imperialists etc.

7. As is usual in these cases, at a time when the government is implementing the aggressive agenda of the bourgeoisie by making the appropriate maneuvers, the opposition is gaining ground in nationalism and bigotry. This includes the parliamentary left. SYRIZA unequivocally plays the game that Mitsotakis played against them in the case of the Prespa imperialist agreement: pretending to disagree with the pragmatic nationalism of the government and trying to take advantage of the worst nationalist reflexes in society by criticizing the ND government for accepting a reduced continental shelf in the agreement with Egypt and for a supposedly subdued operational response to the seismic surveys. KKE denounces the supposed surrender of sovereign rights, poisoning the working class with nationalism and hostility against the Turkish people, and shows how hypocritical and hollow its leftist rhetoric is - at this critical moment, KKE aligns with the aspirations of the Greek bourgeoisie. Even Varoufakis forgot his pre-election statements that hydrocarbons should remain at the bottom of the Mediterranean and called for a pause to the bilateral negotiations with Turkey and, if necessary, a unilateral declaration of an EEZ. The parliamentary left criticizes the right-wing government from a reactionary point of view.

8. The fact that Oruç Reis is operating on the "Greek continental shelf" is a gross inaccuracy. There is neither Greek nor Turkish continental shelf and EEZ in the region, since according to international conventions, when there are conflicting interests, their demarcation presupposes an agreement between the two parties. There is no such agreement. So this is not a Greek continental shelf or EEZ, but a maritime area claimed by both countries. Therefore, the reference of US officials to "disputed areas" is just a realistic description of the situation and not an alleged move against the national interests of Greece, as many tried to support, dispelling the convenient myth that the US is ready to "rob us", thus and hoping to surround the Greek aspirations with a fake anti-imperialist halo.

9. It is also a myth that the international law is on the side of Greece in this dispute. Greece claims a full continental shelf and an EEZ of 200 nautical miles around all its islands, including not only Kastelorizo, an island of a few hundred inhabitants which lies opposite to Turkish cities of hundreds of thousands people, but also the uninhabited Strongyli island (which is necessary in order to achieve a continuous continental shelf and EEZ with Cyprus). The Greek governments have long argued that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Montego Bay Convention) justifies the Greek positions, but they conceal that Turkey has never signed the treaty and is therefore not bound by it (this is the same agreement that provides for the "famous" right to extend the Greek territorial waters to 12 miles). However, even if Turkey was forced to accept that the islands normally have a continental shelf and an EEZ, the extent of these zones is neither self-evident, nor does it arise from the treaty. Greece demands a demarcation based on the principle of "equidistance" (median line), which favors Greece overwhelmingly. However, international practice, as well as the convention itself, provides for the "principle of equity", according to which what is generally fair should be taken into account on a case-by-case basis - is it fair for an uninhabited island or an island with a small population to exclude hundreds of kilometers of densely populated coasts and virtually an entire state of 80 million people? Anyway, international experience shows that in cases where small islands are off the coast of large coastal countries, they are generally granted a severely reduced continental shelf and EEZ (France-Canada dispute over Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, France-Britain dispute over the islands of the Channel, Germany-Denmark-Netherlands dispute over the North Sea islands). Let's say it bluntly: based on the international law forged by the imperialist conventions invoked by Greece, what would be "fair" to only allocate to the Greek islands in the Mediterranean an extremely reduced EEZ.

10. If we insist on the legal aspect, it is not because it is what it really matters, but only to demonstrate that there is no real law that Greece has on its side. The crisis is about a regional imperialist conflict, and it is well known that in these conflicts everyone uses the capitalist "law" as they see and fit. In this dispute, Greece's demands are not "fair". They are outrageous.

11. The working class of Greece (as well as that of Turkey) has nothing to gain from an EEZ which will be exploited exclusively by local capitalists or multinational companies. The fact that the lion's share of the possible hydrocarbon drilling would be taken over by foreign capitalists is secondary, because the interests of all capitalists, regardless of their nationality, are foreign to the workers. Greek and Turkish workers, on the other hand, have everything to lose

from a possible war. A Greco-Turkish war would be a bloodbath for the workers of the two countries for the interests of their bosses alone. But even without the war, the rivalry of the working classes of the two countries makes their respective bourgeoisies and governments stronger, with the power of "national unity" against the supposed common external enemy. It is well known that, in the face of "national danger", any claim and demand of the working class must stop for the so-called common good.

12. The working classes of both countries have only to lose from the transformation of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean into a lake of extraction, within a logic of absolute adherence to the largely depleted hydrocarbon economy, a prospect that will further destroy the already degraded natural environment and that will poison the air and water even more.

13. The working class is expected to be influenced by patriotic myths and nationalist hysteria. National prejudices are very difficult to eradicate. However, we must speak clearly, and tell the truth, even if we will necessarily be a minority in the beginning. If what we are saying today is not popular, the experience of the workers and the poor will soon show that the sovereign rights of Greece which we are called upon to uphold are only in the interests of the capitalists - and our own destruction.

14. The half-truths by which certain sections of the extra-parliamentary left or even anarchy respond do not offer good services to the working class and the oppressed. Left patriots or even "anti-imperialist" anarchists speak of Turkish "provocations" and accept the national myths, either directly or by more sophisticated arguments. Various pretexts are employed for the direct or indirect support to the Greek side:

-The authoritarian or even "fascist" nature of Erdogan's regime, as if the allies of Greece (the dictator of Egypt Sisi, the butcher of the Palestinians Netanyahu or the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE) as well as the Greek government itself served interests other than those served by the Erdogan regime too, that is the interests of the capitalists of their respective countries

- Turkey's supposed economic prevalence over Greece, as if Turkey had not been in a deep economic crisis for some time - to which Erdogan is trying to respond with promises of gas deposits in the Black Sea and potentially in the Mediterranean, as a headlong rush, to the dramatic devaluation of their national currency, among other things

- The revisionist role of Turkey, which is supposed to be the only one that challenges the Treaties and the status quo in the region and threatens to rearrange the borders, as if it were not Greece that, for example, was the first to historically unilaterally expand its territorial sea to 6 nautical miles and its airspace to 10 nautical miles or to station an army on the demilitarized islands;

- The supposed long-term favor of the imperialists towards Turkey, at a moment when the biggest imperialist powers, with Trump and the EU heading the list, are standing by Greece, announcing new sanctions against Turkey for the sake of Greece and Cyprus.

All of the above are pretexts in sin, left slang to join the nationalism that drags workers behind their bosses.

15. In such critical situations, a general pacifist bilateral condemnation of the Greco-Turkish rivalry that is "reactionary on both sides" is not enough either. Of course, the rivalry is reactionary on both sides indeed, and we have no doubt that Erdogan is first and foremost an enemy of the working class and the people living in his own country. However, the labor movement of the peoples of Turkey is the one to deal with him, and it is already doing so, without needing the aid of Greek patriots. The task of the working class here is first and foremost to confront the capitalists of this very country, with their governments, their state, their imperialist aspirations and their war plans.

For an internationalist anti-war movement against national myths

There can be no trust in the negotiations between governments, the imperialist "international factor" and the so-called international law. We need an anti-war movement, in practice, today. To accomplish all this, the working class must get rid of the patriotic and nationalist poison. And this is exactly where the main task of the anti-capitalist left lies: to help do it by uncovering the national myths.

No to the Greek aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean

No mining and extractions in the Mediterranean

Rise up against war plans – for a mass movement inside and outside the army

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6 September 2020

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