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Greece

Towards a police state?

- IV Online magazine - 2001 - IV330 - April 2001 -

Publication date: Tuesday 3 April 2001

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Thanks to a left movement with strong democratic principles, a consequence of the period of resistance to the military junta that collapsed in 1974, Greece has long resisted numerous attempts to establish a police state.

These attempts, in their majority expressing the ideological views of the traditional Right, the political party of "Nea Demokratia", have mainly taken the form of so-called "antiterrorism" laws that suppressed a wide spectrum of political rights and freedoms under the pretext of fighting against a practice which was actually very restricted and without political resonance within the classes of the revolutionary Left in Greece.

All these attempts ended in failure, producing however, from 1974 and onwards, a great number of political prisoners who, after being at first presented to the public as alleged terrorists by the police and a large part of the Greek mass media, were then declared innocent by the courts. Now it is the governing "socialist" party, PASOK, which is taking the initiative in imposing a police state in Greece, submitting to the strong pressures exerted by the USA on the one hand, and on the other, wanting to strengthen itself against the inevitable reactions that will result from the neo-liberal institutional and economical reforms resulting from the country's accession into the Economic and Monetary Union and the globalised economic system.

The establishment of the police state will be implemented mainly through three bills that have already been introduced or will be introduced in the near future into Parliament for voting.

The first bill targets immigrants. Greece is a country with a long tradition of migration. The first large migration wave towards the USA already developed at the end of the 19th century and peaked during the period of 1950-60. This country, according to European statistics, now stands in the first place among European countries with respect to xenophobia, racist attacks against immigrants are an every day phenomenon, while the state's racist practice comes near to medieval behaviour.

The picture is now completed with the introduction of the new anti-immigration law. According to this bill, those immigrants that have crossed the country's borders illegally, in other words the majority, and get caught, will be deprived of any kind of protection and any kind of political and social rights.

The provisions included in the bill penalize all forms of assistance to "illegal" immigrants, providing for imprisonment and heavy fines for law-breakers. Most of all, "illegal" immigrants are deprived of any right to use public services with the only exception the right to appeal to the Council of State, a legal process which is extremely costly.

In addition, the bill forces medical doctors to become informers, demanding that they refuse the medical services to immigrants lacking a permit to stay -except for urgent incidents- and to report immediately to the police every incident of medical treatment given to "illegal" immigrants.

Imprisonment and fines are also provided for against any individual who would offer hospitality or rent out their house to an immigrant without papers, or would "obstruct" their arrest by the police, penalizing therefore any form of solidarity to the immigrants.

The second bill refers to "fighting against terrorism and organised crime". Its provisions provide for the abolition of the presumption of innocence of the accused (from now on the accused will have to prove their innocence rather than the

Towards a police state?

state having to prove their guilt), the penalization of personal relationships with "terrorists", the abolition of the institution of juries (since juries are considered less vulnerable to political pressures and more socially sensitive than professional judges), the potential for supporting accusation based on anonymous witness's testimony, whose identity is not revealed during the penal process, the potential to widely violate the secrecy of one's personal life through extended secret supervisions, and so on.

The reality is that in Greece the activity of the armed organisations has eased off and is isolated from the social movement. Therefore, this law actually targets those that keep resisting, the Left and the anti-authoritarian current.

Indicative of this is the fact that a recent annual report of the State Department includes the demonstrations against the war in Yugoslavia and other anti-imperialist demonstrations as "terrorist actions". The Greek government has opted for "cracking down on terrorism", stepping over the dead body of citizens' rights.

The third bill aims at restricting the right to demonstrate, imposing on those questioning the dominant policy the obligation of getting a "demonstration permit" and naming a person as "responsible" for the demonstration, who will be prosecuted in case of riots, while setting at the same time restrictive conditions regarding the place of demonstration and so on.

The Greek left movement opposes and will keep on resisting all these laws, which pave the way for converting the country into a police state.

The transformation of the country into a fortress, which is being attempted by the neoliberal Simitis' government, aims at developing a generalised climate of obedience within society, with a view in particular to the Olympic games of 2004 that will be held in Athens.

With this report we open up a process of information and we ask for the solidarity of all our comrades living abroad, in our fight against the repressive policies of the Greek government.