

**Social struggles, self-organizing,
the elections' masquerade
and the social movement in Greece,
2008-2015**

Β **α** **Δ**
Κ **Ν**
anarchist
meeting

(by the Thessaloniki “3 Bridges“ assembly)

1. How we got to December 08

Getting started: in order to present the struggles in the period 2008-2015 in Greece, it is necessary to briefly present the social environment and how the movement was formed the previous period.

Back in the 80's we find the roots of the petty bourgeois transformation of the Greek society. After decades marked by the civil war, the repression against the dissidents, dictatorship and class conflicts of the '70s, the rise of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) to power brings a new form of capitalist and social management. Emphasis is placed on stimulating consumption with public investments, agricultural subsidies and nationalisations. The new regime buys social peace by giving money and access to the administration of the State in parts of the population who were for decades excluded from power.

The fall of state capitalism regimes and the influx of migrants completes the petty bourgeois transformation of Greek society in the '90s. Cheap labour gives the opportunity to the natives to grow economically and socially. Immigrants do almost exclusively all manual jobs and the class contradictions are blunted within the native population.

The slogan of a strong Greece which will enter the Eurozone is promoted everywhere. Large national dreams –with highlight the upcoming Olympic Games (2004)– cause uplift and represent the culmination of a new national identity. A new Greece, free from misery, destined to do great things, locals who have access to goods that for the past decades they couldn't imagine – and the ability to be small bosses who exploit the degraded immigrant labor.

Mass class struggles almost disappear, apart from the period 1990-93 and some strikes for the retirement age. The fabulously paid trade union bureaucracy intertwined with politicians and bosses earning advisory bearings, until they get eventually fully discredited. The only social group that from time to time gets involved in some large struggles is youth; high school students mostly, but also university-student

movements, squat schools and university buildings and hold large demonstrations that sometimes lead to conflicts.

At the same time a very active and multiform anarchist movement is evolving and constantly strengthened. In the '80s and '90s it leads the clashes in student demonstrations and anniversaries of the "17th of November 1973" uprising. It grows in quantity and upgrades its political contents managing to become a distinct political pole of the antagonist movement.

It should be noted that most pieces of the subversive movement of the time (anarchists, autonomous, anti-authoritarians), are influenced by the petty bourgeois environment they act in, mainly based on the counter values but also moralistic terms and often developing a rhetoric attacking society without distinction. There isn't any class analysis, at a time when in the lowest position of class stratification the subject "proletarian" was being replaced by the subject "immigrant".

In greek anarchist movement prevails what Bookchin described as lifestyle anarchism, intervening in the here and now with the abstract superior vision of rebellion, refusing to develop a clear strategy towards the revolution. On the other hand, there are many interventions concerning the public space, counterculture, to create islets of freedom that are aggressive towards existing order, solidarity to prisoners and immigrants. All this constitutes a very lively area that has strong momentum, expressed mainly in clashes with riot police, but does not seek to create stable central political structures for its expression.

Since the early 00's and at the end of the Olympic Games on 2004, it is revealed that the national dreams and the aspirations of consumption was a bluff. Slowly the level of living standards stops rising and marginally begins to recede, while the fiscal account of the pharaonic feast of the Olympic Games is overwhelming. The unemployment begins to rise and creates new dynamics at the base of society. This is valid mostly for the young, for whom the ebb of consumption reveals the void of values and cause despair.

A new generation of comrades, that makes the daily dynamic confrontation with the state a more central issue, becomes ever more crucial in the processes of the anarchist movement. From the black block in the EU summit in Thessaloniki in 2003 until the attacks against police squads on a weekly base in Exarchia, large parts of youth coming into contact with the means used by anarchists and join in action. This escalation over the years reaches the repression Minister B. Polydoros to warn the public in December 2006 “Do not play with fire! Because even policemen are people and they are armed also” heralding indirectly the murder of Grigoropoulos two years later.

Closing this chapter, we must recognize that even though molecularly there were initiatives who have constituted the precursor of class-social trends developed in the coming period –from popular assemblies (Petralona 2002), base unions (Union of waiters - COP, Union of couriers - SVEOD) up to autonomous forms in the university faculties and large student demonstrations of 2006– that revived collective spirit in the struggle, the social-class resistance formation process begins simultaneously with the beginning of degradation of lives that the incipient capitalist crisis was bringing.

2. The December 2008 uprising

From 2003 onwards, the anarchist movement expresses its militancy by demonstrating sharp reflexes, spreads its political practices and, with Exarchia (Athens) as the epicentre of its militant activity, it escalates its confrontation with repression police forces.

On December 8th of 2008, the fifteen year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos is assassinated by a cop named Korkoneas. On that very night, and for many nights thereafter, Athens goes ablaze, while clashes with the riot police erupt also in almost all the other, smaller or larger, cities of the greek territory. Young people and other revolted parts of the Greek society take the lead in an uprising that actually rocks the whole of Europe. The role of secondary school students proves to be catalytic.

In almost all neighborhoods of different cities, towns, and even villages, secondary school students demonstrate, sometimes peacefully and other times with real confrontational disposition, against the cops.

In the same month, the attack with vitriol against K. Kuneva by henchmen of her boss, on account of her activity as a syndicalist, imbues the uprising with class characteristics. However, December 2008 cannot be seen as a class rebellion, as the active agents of the uprising were diverse and heterogeneous, with the secondary school students being the ones to set the tone, followed by a number of other youth groups such as university students, as well as by considerable numbers of migrants.

The center of Athens turns into a field of insurgent actions by the revolted youth, with clashes, assemblies, occupations of public buildings and similar activities taking place under the quite indicative absence of the police. The Minister of Public Order (and currently president of the Republic) does not take the risk to suppress the uprising and, as a result, the behaviour of the cops is moderate if not defensive.

Pretty soon, the uprising spreads from the centre to the neighborhoods, with open assemblies of the inhabitants and sit-ins at town halls. Quite characteristic are the examples of the town hall of Nicaea in Athens and of that of Sykies in Thessaloniki. Of course, public buildings occupations and creation of centers of struggle are not limited to neighborhoods but equally frequent as forms of protest in the center of the cities. In Thessaloniki, the presence of hundreds of young people in the occupations of the labor center, the school of theater, and the Olympion cinema denotes the readiness of these people for the «assault to heaven». In this context, and more specifically in the barricades and the squatted spaces, anarchists, probably the liveliest part of an uprising that proved able to respond dynamically and directly to a state murder, are faced with the opportunity to ferment with the secondary school students, university students, the unemployed, etc.

As the uprising was calming down and clashes were gradually receding, there also emerged the first conclusions regarding the events of the December 2008. The latter could not but make it clear, once more,

that there are specific limits to the rhetoric on the «assault to heaven» and that the anarchists felt rather content with the negation of existing order, thus failing to establish a positive project for dealing with the magnitude of the events. Still, however, the effect of December 2008 on the dynamics of the anarchist milieu has been especially significant. New collectives and solidarity initiatives were created, while the already existing ones were reinforced with new members. In this sense then, it would not be an exaggeration to say that after December 2008 the anarchist movement saw an immense growth and acquired better quality characteristics.

On a broader level, December 2008 gave birth to numerous local base initiatives in the neighborhoods of the cities, with people's assemblies and structures of mutual aid, which, if not anything else, started developing some germinal communities of struggle. Of course, the positive effects of December 2008 include also the strengthening of the existing class initiatives and base unions in the workplaces.

The December 2008 uprising has been marked by many as the historical end of the regime that had been the result of the political transition, after the seven-year long (1967-1974) dictatorship. Despite the theatricality of such wordings, it is true that the consensus regarding the power of the consecutive governments had already been cracked and was to finally crumble in the coming years, especially after the outbreak of the crisis.

3. December 2008 – a new era begins

2008 was a hallmark year for the social movements and for anarchists in particular. It is the completion of a historical cycle, a period that had begun with another great insurrection, that of the Polytechnic School during the colonels' junta in 1973. December 2008 marks the eruption of the first and only massive antiauthoritarian insurrection in the history of the modern Greek republic, where anarchist and counter-power elements dominate and play a central role. The former period of “de-

velopment” and “well-being” comes full-circle, and the post-metapolitefsi period of the crisis begins (*“metapolitefsi”= the period following the regime change after the fall of the military dictatorship 1967-1974*). All the piecemeal struggles of the former period (mass demos against the Euro-Summit in Thessaloniki in 2003, student riots in 2006-7) culminated in a full-scale insurrection that shook and challenged everything hitherto considered normal, without however managing to pull it down and subvert it completely. The term “antiauthoritarian” describing this insurrection means in this case that the insurrectionist rhetoric that had been dominant in anarchist circles actually reached its practical conclusion and indeed its deeper strategic goal, insurrection itself. The inability to formulate a positive political mandate and a set of social demands for everyday life, as well the impossibility to manage huge crowds across the country had two consequences: On the one hand they encouraged the antiauthoritarian, uncontrollable and counter-power nature of the riots. On the other, in their diffusion, multiplicity and combative character, they gave birth to a new political subject. A further consequence was the empowerment of all tendencies within the anarchist movement, as well as the creation of anarchist groups and collectivities in towns with no prior organized presence. Anarchist discourse and values, however diverse across different groups and locations, managed to cover the whole geographical space of the country.

rediscovering the politics of everyday life

In contrast to the tradition of interventions in the center of larger cities, the December 2008 insurrection left behind a significant heritage of neighborhood assemblies, communities of struggle, mutual aid structures, that developed in decentralized ways.

The culture of everyday intervention was given new life, the topics of intervention were broadened and went beyond the usual “central political and media issues”, or the habitual strictly anarchist issues (such as solidarity to political prisoners)... Intervention now turned towards

everyday issues from the whole spectrum of social activities. Here we should include certain practices of social counter-politics, taken up on a wide scale by the anarchist movement, such as free learning structures for migrants, solidarity clinics, self-organized food distribution, collective kitchens etc...

beyond the political tradition of the Left

All the above practices got multiplied and enriched with the brutal onslaught of State and Capital after 2009, the period known as the “economic crisis”. Self-organization, in the form of self-managed production structures, cooperatives, and factory occupations, became the battle cry but also the solution to practical problems for people who are not necessarily organized within the anarchist movement. Furthermore, the anarchist movement turned towards class-based initiatives, such as the participation in first-degree unions, their creation and establishment where they do not exist, and the wholehearted embracement of workers’ struggles, and not merely support and expression of solidarity. In other words, from that point onwards, certain parts of the anarchist movement became the subject of workers’ and class struggles, rather than merely the supporters of workers’ demands.

In short, there was a waning of the traditional methods of resisting and opposing power, methods that had been partly inherited by the official culture of the Left since 1974, and which never allowed for the full involvement with local issues, with managing and changing everyday life. For this official Left culture, whenever such issues occurred, they had to be solved institutionally, they had to be mediated by State power structures and capitalist institutions, they had to be handed over to elected representatives in local parliaments and the State. What had really happened is that people’s trust in this kind of politics was dead and gone. Instead, direct action, self-organization from below, and horizontal structures came to the fore. This movement took the forms of committees to reconnect electricity supplies that had been cut off for unpaid bills, collective rejection to pay the new electricity tax,

the road tolls, mass transportation fares, the breaking of controls at student alimentation halls, collective resistance to house evictions etc... All this describes the extent to which the regime was de-legitimized, while the will to disobey, refuse and resist authority was growing.

4. the State's response and the movement's reaction

counterinsurgency after 2009

The State's response to all this was the strategy of counter-insurgency, articulated in three parts: First the tightening of the repressive apparatus (legal framework, new police units, further augmentation of existing ones), the adoption by the State of ultra-rightwing rhetoric and the ideological hegemony of the narrative of zero tolerance, and finally the management of the migrant issue through detention camps and mass arrest operations. Second, attacks against minorities such as addicts and HIV positive individuals and the construction of an "enemy within" complemented the profile of contemporary State totalitarianism. It is characteristic that both the ["social democrat" PASOK minister] Loverdos and [the right-wing minister] Dendias employed common narratives in their propaganda. Finally, the counter-insurgent strategy was completed with the support of the para-State sector of the golden dawn (where nazis supported State policies and remained unpunished for the crimes they were appointed to execute).

The conditions of the international financial crisis take over in 2009 and have since dominated the political agenda of the media. The efforts of the State to bail out the banks, to support the bosses and to transfer economic problems to the people below are the main features of Greek society during this period. The political choices of the memoranda are directed solely towards saving the international banking system. This goal is achieved through extreme anti-worker measures, and policies destroying worker's benefits, welfare and social rights. The strategy of violent proletarianization aims at breaking the oversized middle-class while also leading the lower strata to dire poverty and misery.

The State mobilized its mechanisms for spreading fear and insecurity in order to neutralize any reflexes for resistance. Under the conditions of economic crisis, and with the rise of nazism, movements now were facing new challenges. On the one hand they had to fight against the climate of fear and blackmail created by the State, so that the feeling of being in an impasse would not prevail. On the other, they had to destroy those para-State circles that were doing the State's dirty job.

the "squares' movement" and general strikes 2010-2012

This multifarious battle against the imposition of economic policies and fascism activated the preexisting structures within the movement, such as neighborhood assemblies and collective kitchens, and also proved the necessity of antifascism as part of a broader struggle against authority. The first wave of resistance soon broke out: The first general strikes were called, bringing together hundreds of thousands of people, city centers were blocked and clashes in Athens were half a step away from invading the parliament.

This widespread, diffuse expression of rage was abruptly halted with the announcement of the tragic death of three bank clerks at the Marfin bank, who suffocated inside the building during a mass demonstration in Athens. The State revealed its most repulsive face, exploiting the death of three human beings to repress social unrest, attack specific individuals and present political ideas, groups and people as the arch-enemy within.

The anarchist movement persisted and proved that its visions, aims, values and actions are about life and freedom, and not death. A number of major strikes mark this period, notably the 5th of May 2010, the 19th-21st June 2011 and the 12th of February 2012. Throughout this time, demos were being choked in tear gas and hyper-zealous riot cop antics.

The response to the shock doctrine tactics employed by the State was twofold: 1. the "squares movement" of the indignados and 2. general strikes.

The indignados movement brought a massive crowd out to the streets for a while. However, it also gave rise to a new supra-class social fantasy, seeking “better” political mediation, with an intensely patriotic rhetoric which of course was an obstacle to the deepening of social radicalization of a great number of people, who at first had been actually longing to get in contact with ideas, direct decision-making processes and actions. The dominant discourse of the “squares” fluctuated between constructing the “traitors of our homeland” and a sterile anti-germanism. From this mess, there was some temporary profit to be gained by certain left-wing party politicians, and -obviously- by all kinds of ultra right-wingers.

The general strikes on the other hand gave birth to several worthwhile efforts to demolish the political status quo. It opened up vast and combative fields of struggle. Even though the strikes were no apparent success, Capital was forced to defend itself and recompose the government.

antifascism

It seemed like there was no strategic plan for conflict and rebuilding. The parallel support structures of the movement were less active and could not contribute more decisively to the ongoing struggles. The workers were fragmented, and held on to a petit-bourgeois disposition. At the same time though, the struggle against fascism, a mighty, combative and massive activity, was carried out almost exclusively by the anarchist movement. Hundreds of antifascist initiatives cropped up at every corner of the country, in neighborhoods, towns and villages. The antifascist struggle acquired purely combative characteristics, with clashes, beatings-up of fascists etc. Especially in Athens, such practices became an everyday phenomenon, and prevented the permanent rooting of nazi presence in certain neighborhoods. The struggle reached a climactic point with the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas by Nazis in September 2013. Mass demos, riots and clashes throughout the country forced the State to hold back and lift some of the full pro-

tection it had been granting its own para-State forces. Some nazis were temporarily jailed.

The movement is gaining ground and is preparing for the time when the State will give them the green light again to come out of their holes and into the streets.

5. The conjunctural electoral success of Syriza at 2012 and the end of an era for the movemenets

One of the highlights in the evolution of social movements in the period we are looking at was the unexpected second place occupied by Syriza in the elections of 6 May 2012. But to understand fully this not so surprising continuity we have to see what really Syriza is, beyond the fanfare that sold initially in order to survive politically and then to conquer the government.

Syriza is the political continuation of Synaspismos (SYN), in fact a façade of the latter. SYN came from the collaboration of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) with the Eurocommunists of EAR back in 1989. This collaboration knows important electoral percentages, but soon the KKE left the coalition, so that in SYN remain the Eurocommunists together with some repentant Stalinists. The following elections in 1993 fails to catch the 3% threshold and stays outside parliament.

SYN reserves for all the years of its independent existence as the main ideological reference Berlinguer, the Italian Secretary of the Communist Party of Italy in the 70s and inspirer of the historic compromise. As a political party SYN didn't have any significant representation at youth level, it didn't have a student section either and had minimal intervention in trade unions. It was a party composed mostly of 40-year-olds, former youths of the '70s with loose, mostly emotional, relationships which was looking for its place in the political scene, constantly penetrating to PASOK or KKE and entering marginally in the parliament, lacking in social and kinematic level of any base.

In 2002, a step prior to dissolution, to survive politically SYN opens its ranks to various leftist groups in order to create an electoral front. Promising parliamentary representation helps Syriza cooperate with leftist organizations, which were called “the components”, trying to adopt the image of Syriza being “part of the movement” and to acquire social rhizomes, primarily amongst the youth. Up to the 2012 elections Syriza still enters marginally in the parliament, while no congressman is elected by any other Syriza component except the ones from SYN. This brought discontent, which was dealt by sharing the financial grants given by the state between the various Syriza components. Groupuscules of a few dozen members have access to thousands of euros to finance their anemic action.

The elections of 2012 are made in an frowned environment for the two government parties, New Democracy and PASOK, with many people asking for an alternative political expression. The failure of the resistance movements in the previous years to produce a positive political alternative away from the polls, along with weariness from the continuous beating and the chemicals which were not mirrored by the slightest victory, created an unprecedented electoral landscape. An important element is that the leftist components even though they had minimal intervention in movement level or inside Syriza, they were the pretext under which Syriza used to take advantage the electoral part that developed and found out of nowhere as the exponent of the movements.

In an election with 35% abstention rates and lower rates for all parties, where the first party (ND) got 18.85%, and four other parties had over 10% Syriza came second with 16.78%, a rate far above any expectation of its leadership. The failure of the government to emerge leads in a successive election which consolidates the Syriza in the second place. Syriza is suddenly out of nowhere to dominate for the next period the political scene as a counterweight against the political regime that «destroyed the country» and the sure winner of the next elections. It pledges easy solutions without economic or social costs and address in all classes promising everything to everyone.

The second position of Syriza in the elections marked the end of a phase of conflicts, processes and capabilities. In essence it marked the end of movements of the preceding period. Syriza emerged as the mediator which will handle humanely all the things for which thousands of people have fought courageously the past years. He tried and succeeded largely to develop dynamic and penetrate movements suppressing them from the interior (eg the struggle in Skouries against goldmining in Chalkidiki) falsely promising to satisfy the demands as soon as it will be elected government, seeking the imposition of social peace to smoothly reap power. He turns to irrigate with the poison of commissioning every glints of hope that established the years 2008-2012, leading to the anticipation of hope that would come through the ballot box and ultimately to withering.

6. After the end(?) of the electoral bluff

The prevalence of Syriza in the elections of January 2015 and the subsequent coalition with the far-right party of Independent Greeks (AN.EL.) was a benchmark. The biggest part of Greek society, having placed its hopes in the “first left government” expected the restoration of “human capitalism”: return of the welfare state and social benefits. At the same time, the expectation that Syriza would overthrow harsh memorandum austerity policy and cancel austerity measures that were imposed in the recent past, led to a widespread support to Syriza. The electoral victory of Syriza, a result of growing social discontent, frustration and rejection of old-party political personnel parallel to Syriza incorporating the demands made by wide sectors of the resistance movement and assimilating the looks and the discourse of the movement, transforming it into electoral rhetoric, on the one hand brought general euphoria and renewed confidence in the parliamentary superstructure and on the other hand pacified the movement.

However, despite the pre-electoral communication fireworks and rhetoric statements for a rupture with the lenders, so Greece could remain “with dignity into the euro and E.U.”, before Syriza completed

one month in the government, it signed –as expected– a new deal – a statement of submission. Despite the fact that the negotiation of the new Greek government aimed at signing of a memorandum with less onerous terms, in order to present it as a success and become accepted as a self-evident victory, the Syriza government was faced with a rigid punitive attitude by its European partners. This attitude aimed to teach a lesson and set an example for other governments and societies and also in consolidating the doctrine of unswervingly application of extreme liberal politics and imposition of modern totalitarianism.

The inability of Syriza to manage the sinking of the negotiations and the social and political cost of the new “left” Memorandum led to the selection of the referendum in an attempt to shift the responsibility of compromise to the Greek society and receive a social confirmation for the subsequent austerity policies to be imposed. However, contrary to what the people thought, Syriza chose a referendum with such a question, that the government would be able to manage any result. The period before the referendum there were demonstrations in support of NO, which actually were demonstrations of support towards the government, lacking any radical features. The NO which finally prevailed in the referendum with a percentage of 61% was used as a validation for the government politics, despite the opposite will of many of the people who voted NO.

Nevertheless, the coalition Syriza-ANEL under the weight of internal disagreements and conflicts and under the pressure caused by lack of internal cohesion (as many members of the government and the party differentiated themselves from government choices), lost parliamentary majority and the country went again to elections on September 20th. The election result renewed the coalition Syriza-ANEL in power but with heavy losses. With rates of abstention up to 40%, this victory can be characterized only as a Pyrrhic one. The votes in favor of SY.RI.ZA were in fact acceptance of defeat. Therefore, the unprecedented for Greece numbers of those who consciously abstained from the electoral process opens a wide field of intervention for us anarchists.