

Greek ex-lefts denounce truck drivers strike

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16 August 2010

The reaction of Greece's petty-bourgeois ex-left parties to the recent truckers' strike, which was ultimately ended by the mobilization of the army, is a devastating exposure of their hostility to the working class. These parties—SYRIZA, Antarsya, and the Greek Communist Party (KKE)—denounced the truckers for striking in defense of their working conditions and praised the unions who were isolating and selling out the strike.

The strike was called against the deregulation and privatisation of so-called “closed-shop” professions, which include truckers as well as pharmacists, accountants, civil engineers, lawyers, and notaries. These professions employ over 150,000 people. As the cuts were part of the €110 billion bank bailout negotiated with the IMF and European Union, the strike expressed workers' hostility to the entire austerity program of the social-democratic PASOK government of Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou.

The six-day strike by 33,000 truckers demonstrated the enormous social power of the truck drivers, whose strike rapidly shut down the Greek economy. Within days petrol stations were drying up and essential deliveries were not reaching airports, power stations and other facilities. Factories nationwide had begun to close as a result, and food was not reaching many Greek islands.

By demonstrating the working class' ability to powerfully oppose the Papandreou government's highly unpopular policies, the strike placed the survival of the government in doubt. Under these conditions, the middle-class groups rapidly moved to defend Papandreou and his cuts from the workers.

Dimitris Papadimoulis, a parliamentary deputy of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), attacked the truckers' action. He said the strike was “taking the form of strangling the market, queues at petrol stations, etc., and does not have any social support”.

Some openly called for the workers to end the strike, so Papandreou's measures could be carried through. Fotis Kouvelis, the leader of the Democratic Left, a recently formed split-off from SYRIZA, said it was necessary to end the action “to facilitate the re-starting of talks, on the basis of abolishing the old closed-shop regime”.

On August 3, *Avghi*, the newspaper of Synaspismos, the largest tendency in SYRIZA, published an article on the truckers strike. Entitled, “Cut off from society”, it said, “The decisive factor was the fact that the truck owners were cut off from the rest of society. Despite the political fantasy of many on the left, i.e., that the truck owners were struggling for the whole of society, and the traditional friendship of the right, which provocatively undermined the handing out of [conscription] papers to the truck owners, the truckers' central conception clearly failed”.

The central contention of *Avghi*'s article was a lie, designed to divide the workers: in fact, the truckers' strike expressed the opposition of the entire working class to Papandreou's profoundly unpopular cuts. *Avghi* dismissed this as a “left-wing fantasy”.

Avghi continued with a slander against striking truckers: “Copying the method of mobilisations carried out before the fiscal collapse, they attempted to blackmail the government by blockading all of economic and social life”.

Avghi's description of the workers as blackmailers is an outrageous falsification of reality. In fact, Papandreou and the banks are blackmailing the working class, demanding devastating cuts while holding over workers' heads the threat of state bankruptcy and the collapse of government social services and jobs.

The article concluded, “More and more people are now realising that the privileged, more or less, clientelist regulations, for the powerful and less

powerful in society were being paid for by huge loans”.

This passage encapsulates the right-wing outlook of the petty-bourgeois ex-left. SYRIZA denounces the defence of the working conditions of the “less powerful” in society as illegitimate blackmail, because they must be financed by the financial aristocracy that controls the banks. Falling silent on the immense privileges of the ruling class, it denounces the workers as privileged.

Significantly, *Avghi*’s criticism of the conservative parties was itself from the right—on the basis that their tactical opposition to Papandreou “undermined the handing out of [conscription] papers” to the truck drivers. That is, *Avghi* would have preferred the right-wing parties to more efficiently assist Papandreou in strangling the strike.

Antarsya, which has attempted to falsely present itself as a more left and militant force than SYRIZA, essentially acted as the cheerleaders of the union bureaucracy during the strike.

The Socialist Workers Party (SEK) is the largest component of Antarsya. In an article reporting the ending of the dispute, SEK’s newspaper reproduced, entirely uncritically, extensive quotes from the demagogic truckers’ union leader Vasilis Tzimouragkas. This is despite SEK being forced to acknowledge that that six out of the eight primary unions in PSXEM—the truckers’ federation—voted to call off the strike, under conditions in which 60 percent of the rank and file had voted to continue.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE) refused to openly support the truckers, one of whose demands was for the protection of the resale value of their truck licenses. KKE leader Aleka Papariga said of strikers, “It’s not enough to be against the consequences of the market, one has to be against the market itself”.

These are pompous Stalinist lies, aiming to provide a false, “left”-sounding justification for opposing the strikers: that by defending the resale value of their licenses, they were accepting the free market. What Papariga tries to imply by her statement—that the KKE takes on capitalism as a whole and is to the left of the strikers—is completely false. The KKE has a long history of backing right-wing policies, whether as a party of government or as a cheerleader for the unions’ treacherous negotiations with Papandreou.

The refusal of the ex-left to support the truckers was

the subject of a comment in *Ethnos* by PASOK national council member Nikos Bistis, titled “Loud silences”. Bistis wrote, “In the end, despite all the ink that was spilt, we didn’t receive a clear opinion from the parties of opposition in support of the two blackmailing mobilisations of the truck owners and the air traffic controllers”.

He concluded, “With such an opposition, PASOK’s only opponents are the formidable problems of the country”.

Bistis’s comments are misleading, not least in that the actions of the petty-bourgeois parties make quite clear that they do not support, but rather oppose, the truckers’ strike. However, his second comment underscores that the Greek bourgeoisie itself is quite clear on the role played by the ex-left parties.

Their role is to politically isolate and disarm workers’ struggles, so that the state and the banks have a free hand resolving the Greek debt crisis in the interests of the ruling class.



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