

Greek ruling elite prepares for showdown with working class

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26 May 2012

As Greece prepares for elections on June 17 amid an overwhelming popular rejection of austerity, the ruling class is making secret preparations for a military crackdown against the workers. These preparations are taking place in parallel with more public discussions within the European Union on financial mechanisms to penalize Greece, should the Greek population vote to reject EU austerity demands.

An article published Wednesday in the right-wing Greek daily *Kathimerini*, “Euro Exit Scenario Gives Greece 46 Hours to Manage Process,” lays out a “synthesis of euro-exit scenarios from 21 economists, analysts and academics.” The newspaper writes that the introduction of a new Greek currency would need to be meticulously planned and carried out within a 46-hour window, over a weekend, in consideration of global stock market trading schedules.

There would be immediate moves to repress social opposition. The article states: “Over the two days, leaders would have to calm civil unrest while managing a potential sovereign default, planning a new currency, recapitalizing the banks, stemming the outflow of capital and seeking a way to pay bills once the bailout lifeline is cut.”

Citing two senior researchers, the article notes that “the country may deploy its military as soon as early morning Saturday and close its borders, preparing to stamp euros as drachma as an interim solution once a public announcement has been made.”

Greece’s outgoing finance minister, Filippos Sachinidis, said of an exit from the euro, “All our achievements will be wiped out and it will happen in such a violent way, I don’t know if we will be able to continue functioning as a modern democracy.”

In these comments there is an undoubted element of political blackmail. The ruling elite declares that the workers must accept every cut demanded by finance

capital and the Greek state or face an apocalypse. Should the workers refuse, they warn, the banks will cut off credit to Greece, forcing it to print its own money. Overnight, the markets will financially ruin the country by speculating against the new currency. At this point, the army will be deployed to halt bank runs by depositors and crush social opposition.

The political establishment hopes by publicizing such arguments to secure a vote for Greece’s traditional ruling parties, the right-wing New Democracy (ND) and the social democratic PASOK, which support the EU austerity measures and so-called “bailouts.” In the May 6 elections, these two parties together won only 32 percent of the vote.

More fundamentally, however, the “contingencies” being discussed and planned, both openly and secretly, reflect the acute intensification of class antagonisms in Greece and internationally.

What has been imposed in Greece, under the diktat of the “troika”—the European Union, European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—is barbarity on a scale unseen since the Nazi occupation. An official at Greece’s official statistics bureau said last week: “By the close of 2012, we estimate the economy will have shrunk by a total of 27 percent since the start of the recession five years ago... That’s almost a third. It’s completely unprecedented for an advanced Western economy.”

Whether finance capital tries to continue its failed euro bailout or decides to speculate against a national Greek currency, the enforcement through the existing parliamentary mechanisms of such brutal and unpopular social attacks will grow increasingly difficult. Hence the growing threat of a recourse to some form of military-police rule. The Greek people have already had a bitter experience with such methods in the form of the 1967-1974 military junta.

Since the eruption of the financial crisis in 2008, the Greek ruling class has repeatedly relied on the army to suppress working class opposition. The army was mobilized to smash the 2010 truckers' strike and was poised to intervene against the 2011 refuse workers' strike.

On February 4, 2011, the Athens News Agency reported that the army's 71st Airborne Brigade had staged an exercise involving a mock confrontation with anti-austerity protesters. In September that year, thousands of retired army officers protested and hundreds stormed the defence ministry, calling for the overthrow of the PASOK government. The Association of Support and Cooperation of the State Armed Forces warned then-Prime Minister George Papandreou that the army was following his policies "with increased concern."

Then-Defence Minister Panos Beglitis declared, "Such bullying and anti-democratic behaviour that goes against the democratic government of the country is an insult that will be immediately repressed." On November 1, shortly before Papandreou resigned, Beglitis sacked the entire general staff of the armed forces, leading to suspicion that a coup had been narrowly averted.

Ten days ago, with no party able to form a government following the May 6 general election, Prime Minister Lucas Papademos, having himself been installed without an election, handed over power to a caretaker government under senior judge Panayiotis Pikrammenos. The character of this interim government is instructive.

Frangos Frangoulis, a retired general and ex-chief of staff of the armed forces, was appointed defence minister. Frangoulis, a former Marine commander, was removed from his position as armed forces chief of staff in Beglitis's surprise reshuffle in November 2011.

Named as minister of citizen protection was Eleftherios Economou, a former chief of police with a long history in the state intelligence services. In addition to running the Hellenic Police, he will oversee the Secretariat for Civil Defence, the National Intelligence Service, the Hellenic Fire Service, the Hellenic Coast Guard and the Greek Agrarian Police.

One of the last acts of the Papandreou government in October 2011 was to appoint Economou to the post of general secretary for public order. He was made deputy minister for citizen protection by the Papademos regime and has now been promoted to his current role.

There are also numerous reports of close connections between the police and the fascist Golden Dawn, which garnered 7 percent of the vote in the May 6 election.

The *Guardian* on May 3 wrote of Golden Dawn members being allowed to "terrorise, insult and attack their perceived enemies, often with members of the police looking the other way or, even worse, collaborating with them..."

An analysis of Golden Dawn's vote by *To Vima* calculated that more than half of all police officers in Greece voted for the fascists.

A warning must be made in particular concerning an attack Thursday morning by some 30 police officers who attempted to break into the headquarters of the Socialist Workers Party (SEK) in Athens. They were reportedly joined by a "group of fascists... in shouting racist obscenities and attempting to kick down the front door." The raid was called off only after the arrival of a senior police officer.

The greatest threat posed to workers in Greece is their lack of political preparation for the grave situation they face. SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left) has thus far been the main beneficiary of anti-austerity sentiment among workers. But it is a bourgeois, not working class, party, despite its left rhetoric and criticisms of the terms of the EU bailout packages. Adamantly opposed to a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and the Greek state, it works to sow illusions and politically disarm the working class, promoting the myth that voting for its candidates in the June 17 general election will help persuade Europe's politicians and bankers to give way.

Meanwhile, the ruling class in Greece and Europe is left to plan its own response to the growing anger and resistance of the working class and a vote against the austerity measures—the economic devastation of Greece and mass repression.



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