

Greece: Fascists step up assaults on political opponents and migrants

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The assault launched by the spokesman for Greece's neo-fascist Golden Dawn against two political rivals on live television must be taken as a warning to working people. Especially in a country with a history of military dictatorship, the emergence of such far-right violence points to the threat of a turn to openly authoritarian forms of rule.

The attack took place in the context of the build-up to elections on June 17, which are dominated by the threat of a Greek exit from the euro. Whatever the result, the election will be followed by a vast intensification of the austerity measures against the Greek population.

Golden Dawn spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris attacked Liana Kanelli of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and Rena Dourou of the pseudo-left coalition SYRIZA during a political debate on morning television last Thursday. Kasidiaris threw a glass of water at Dourou, after Dourou pointed out his well-documented links to acts of violence, and then hit Kanelli in the face on several occasions after she protested Kasidiaris's attack on Dourou.

The incident provoked widespread shock and disgust across Greece, and videos of the assault circulated widely on the Internet. Over the weekend, anti-fascist rallies in Athens and other Greek cities drew thousands onto the streets to demonstrate against Golden Dawn.

The protests were driven by more news of violent attacks by Golden Dawn members. Earlier this month, two of Golden Dawn's newly elected MPs were arrested in Athens over an attack on a Pakistani immigrant. On the same day as Kasidiaris's assault, eight Golden Dawn members attacked a group of political activists who were distributing leaflets in Veria, before ransacking a café and causing serious injury to a 53-year-old man.

The broad popular hostility to such acts of fascist

thuggery contrasts sharply with the response of the state and political apparatus in Greece.

Despite his violent assault, Kasidiaris left the TV studio without being apprehended. The police claimed they were unable to find Kasidiaris, who had supposedly gone into hiding.

The police's claim that they were unable to find him before the expiration of a 48-hour arrest warrant cannot be taken at face value. During this period, Kasidiaris was interviewed on television, where he used the platform to denounce his assault victims for having provoked him.

On Sunday evening, he addressed an election rally ahead of the vote on June 17, where he was cheered by supporters.

On Monday, Kasidiaris failed to appear in court on charges concerning another violent assault, in which he is accused of aiding in an armed robbery that left a student severely injured in 2007. The post-graduate student was stabbed. Kasidiaris is believed to have been driving the vehicle carrying the attacker.

The trial has been repeatedly delayed on one pretext or another and, rather than ordering Kasidiaris's detention, the judge merely set another date for the hearing in September.

Just hours later, Kasidiaris appeared before a public prosecutor to press charges against Kanelli, Dourou and the television station broadcasting the programme, claiming that they had provoked him! Once again, Kasidiaris was able to leave unimpeded.

Kasidiaris's ability to act with virtual impunity reflects the fact that the fascist policies of his party are viewed favourably by significant sections of the ruling class, the military and the police.

Kasidiaris and party leader Nikos Michaloliakos were both formerly active in the Greek military.

Michaloliakos was one of the founders of Golden Dawn, formed around the publication of a magazine in 1980. Throughout its history, the party has been synonymous with brutal attacks on political opponents, the promotion of the most virulent anti-immigrant chauvinism, and a celebration of the supremacy of the Greek nation. The party is unabashed in displaying its fascist ideology, with Golden Dawn's symbol resembling the swastika and Michaloliakos performing the Nazi salute. He has also declared his admiration for the dictatorship of the colonels that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974.

Golden Dawn's support within the police and armed forces has a long pedigree.

In 1998, Golden Dawn member Antonios Androutsopoulos was accused of three counts of attempted murder. He evaded capture by the authorities until he voluntarily gave himself up in 2005, which raised questions about the role of the police.

In an article published by the *Ta Nea* newspaper in 2004, a confidential internal investigation by the police was revealed, which concluded that police connections to Golden Dawn had hindered the arrest of Androutsopoulos. The article cited evidence of police forces providing batons and communications equipment to Golden Dawn members at rallies, and that many members were allowed to carry illegal weapons.

Members of the police make up Golden Dawn's core constituency. In the elections held on May 6 this year, close to 50 percent of police officers voted for the party, helping it to obtain nearly 7 percent of the vote and enter parliament for the first time with 21 seats.

The party campaigned under the slogan "so we can rid this land of filth", seeking to divert anger over the austerity policies of the major parties into the reactionary channels of anti-immigrant chauvinism.

Since the elections, attacks against immigrants have increased, with reports of violent assaults on African migrants in particular, and an arson attack on a migrants' hostel in Athens last week.

Sections of the political and state apparatus are clearly anticipating the development of widespread social unrest in the aftermath of the elections and continuing austerity policies, and are working with the fascists to this end. Discussions on the need to turn to dictatorial methods of rule are now openly taking place.

Meanwhile, SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras, whose

party could form a government after Sunday's election, has held secret discussions with the Greek military and on Monday he offered his sympathy and support to the police during a visit to the Attical General Police Headquarters in Athens.



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