

Racist murder in Greece reflects rising neo-Nazi influence

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Early on Sunday morning, five dark-clad figures mounted on four motorcycles rode through the neighborhood of Omonia Square in central Athens, hunting down immigrants. Upon encountering a 19-year-old Iraqi, they beat him with their fists and stones and stabbed him several times with a knife. The young man died the same day in a hospital.

This racially motivated murder is the brutal culmination of a systematic manhunt of immigrants organized by the state in recent weeks. The motorcycle gang had already attacked a Romanian and a Moroccan in the same district, unmolested by the police. The first two victims were able to get to safety in time, however.

The murder in Athens is part of a wave of racist violence in Greece. On Saturday a violent attack was launched against a group of Pakistanis in Heraklion, Crete. Shops owned by migrants in the port city of Piraeus have been repeatedly attacked. Smoke bombs were hurled into one shop that also serves as a mosque.

Five hundred immigrants have been admitted to hospital due to racist attacks in the first half of 2012. According to reports in the newspaper *Ta Nea*, based on various non-governmental organizations, this is nearly double the total of victims of similar attacks over the same period last year.

These attacks are the direct result of a government policy supported by the EU. Just a week before the murder, 4,500 policemen were involved in a major operation to hunt down migrants. They took 6,700 foreign-looking people into custody and interned 1,555 in special camps where they are now awaiting

deportation. Hundreds have already been deported.

The minister responsible for civil protection, Nikos Dendias of the conservative New Democracy party, justified the manhunt by comparing immigrants to “occupiers” in “the biggest invasion that Greece has ever experienced.” With such repulsive comments, the minister encouraged attacks on migrants and put the perpetrators of fascist attacks on immigrants on a par with resistance fighters during Nazi occupation in World War II.

In recent years the fascist party *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn), which plays a leading role in the attacks on immigrants, has been systematically built up by various Greek governments. In 2004, *Ta Nea* had already reported on close ties between the fascists and the state apparatus.

The fascist party works closely with the police. In demonstrations by leftist or anarchist groups, police officials handed batons and radios to the fascists so they could provoke violence. In addition, police have allowed members of Golden Dawn to carry various weapons.

Golden Dawn member Antonios Androutsopoulos—who murdered a leftist student activist in 1998—was able to avoid capture for seven years, very probably with the assistance of the police. He was eventually apprehended in 2005. Although more people were involved in the murder, only Androutsopoulos was prosecuted.

Also in 1998, the *Eleftherotypia* newspaper reported that race riots in Thessaloniki had been organized by

“racist forces within the police.” No one was arrested after the riots.

This list of collaboration by the police with the fascists could be extended up to the present. In the last elections, the daily *To Vima* reported that 50 percent of police officers voted for Golden Dawn.

Greece’s migrant rights’ organization Expel Racism has reported hundreds of cases where police officers watched by idly during attacks on migrants. There have also been reports of foreigners being beaten in police stations, and police officers giving residents the telephone number of Golden Dawn when they complained about immigrants.

“We are scared to go on the streets,” one migrant told the daily newspaper *Kathimerini*. “It’s Ramadan, we were invited to dinner, but we will not go. If we go out we will be intercepted either by the police or Golden Dawn.”

The German newspaper *Die Welt* reported on a woman from Georgia who was sexually threatened in Athens by a member of Golden Dawn. After they went to the police, the man returned in the evening accompanied by officers from the local station and boasted: “Do you see now who my friends are?”

The Greek government—New Democracy (ND), together with the social-democratic PASOK and Democratic Left (DIMAR) parties—supports the fascist forces in order to create a political atmosphere in which any popular opposition can be violently attacked. Their foremost goal is to prepare the brutal suppression of any movement in the working class against the unpopular austerity measures demanded by the EU, which have wrecked the Greek economy.

The social attacks undertaken by the government, which have already led to widespread misery and poverty and are to be intensified, are increasingly incompatible with even the forms of democratic rule.

Under conditions where bourgeois “left” parties such as SYRIZA have blocked the emergence of mass working class struggles against the EU and the policies

of the Greek bourgeoisie, fascistic forces can pose as the only alternative to the existing political set-up. As social tensions grow, the ruling elite promotes ever more right-wing forces, and bourgeois rule assumes an ever more dictatorial character.

In this context there have been demands raised for a ban of Golden Dawn, notably by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks. Noting that Golden Dawn is among the “most overtly extremist and Nazi party in Europe,” he has asked the Greek government to “probe the legality of the party,” according to *Kathimerini*.

Such a ban, however, would not afford any protection for migrants or put an end to the influence of far-right forces. Indeed, they are tied to and protected by the very security forces of the Greek bourgeois state that such a ban would task with repressing Golden Dawn.

Instead it would strengthen the state apparatus and provide an excuse to criminalize political opponents and disband oppositional and leftist political organizations. This would strengthen the apparatus of repression and lead rapidly in the direction of authoritarianism.

The defense of immigrants’ rights requires the mobilization of the working class to fight the austerity policies of the EU and the rising influence of fascist forces. This struggle can only be successful when it is based on a socialist struggle against capitalism, which is increasingly turning towards the most right-wing elements.



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