

Defend immigrants in Greece

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11 August 2012

Last weekend, Athens witnessed events not seen since Greece's military dictatorship of 1967-1974. Some 4,500 police officers were mobilized to round up thousands of people, singled out because their skin colour and general appearance suggested they were immigrants.

Over 1,400 people were interned in camps and are now awaiting deportation. Many were beaten.

This was the culmination of raids and mass arrests targeting undocumented immigrants carried out over previous weeks. The police have collaborated with members of *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn), who openly identify with the Nazis. Fascist gangs have been encouraged by the police to threaten, abuse and attack immigrants.

These events in Athens are a stark warning to workers internationally. What begins as attacks on the most oppressed sections of workers will soon be directed against the entire working class. The ruling elites are preparing to brutally suppress all resistance to their austerity measures, mobilising the most reactionary forces.

The social counterrevolution is more advanced in Greece than in any other European country. Over the past three years real wages have been reduced by up to 60 percent, hundreds of thousands have been laid off, and the welfare system has been destroyed. The official unemployment rate increased in one year by more than a third and is now a record high 23.1 percent. Youth unemployment is 55 percent.

New budget deficits caused by the collapse in tax receipts, as austerity measures undermine the economy, are to be closed through even deeper attacks on workers, pensioners and youth. Another 40,000 layoffs in the public sector are to be imposed to make sure that the terms of the loan agreements with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund are fulfilled.

For large parts of the population the situation is becoming simply impossible. It is only a matter of time before popular anger and indignation boil over. Union officials are already warning of a social explosion. Under these circumstances, the witch-hunting of immigrants, which is supported by the European Commission, has two objectives.

It strengthens the state apparatus and consolidates fascist groups to be used against working class opposition. The minister for civil protection, Nikos Dendias, has increased the Athens police force by 1,500 officers and—as at the Halyvourgia Ellados steel plant—deployed them against strikers.

Greece, which for two years has served as the testing ground for the destruction of social rights, is now to be a laboratory for the development of authoritarian forms of rule. The cuts dictated by the banks are simply incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

The hounding of immigrants also serves to divide the working class, a tactic as old as it is vile. To divert attention from its responsibility for the economic and social crisis, the ruling class deliberately fuels xenophobia and racism, using immigrants as scapegoats.

Civil Protection Minister Dendias has publicly stated that the problem of immigration is greater than the financial problem—a transparent attempt to divert attention from his government's responsibility for the cuts.

Workers in Greece and Europe must oppose all attempts to stir up anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment. Regardless of their origin or ethnic background, workers have the same interests and face the same enemy all over the world: a ruthless financial aristocracy willing to do anything to defend its privileges and wealth.

Many refugees in Greece come from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and other countries that have been

militarily ravaged or driven into civil war by the same governments that are responsible for the austerity measures in Greece. People who escaped the hell of war are now being hunted down in the streets of Athens.

In many other European countries state-supported campaigns are being waged against immigrants and ethnic minorities. They serve as a starting point for building up the state apparatus and the consolidation of fascist forces, and are directed against the entire working class. European workers can defend their own democratic rights and social gains only when they oppose the attacks of the police and right-wing forces against refugees.

Pseudo-left groups like the Coalition of the Alternative Left (SYRIZA) are an obstacle. Once again SYRIZA has demonstrated its cowardice and opportunism. The second largest party in parliament, it has not lifted a finger to defend immigrants against the attacks of the police. It has issued a few meaningless words of protest, followed by assurances of its loyalty to the state.

Just a day after the police pursued immigrant workers through the streets of Athens, SYRIZA demanded a parliamentary debate on enlarging the ranks of the police and providing them with better equipment. This party—based on well-off sections of the middle class—thereby indicated its sympathy for the security forces and its instinctive hostility and fear of the working class.

The defence of the rights of workers, immigrant and native born, and the fight against the austerity measures of the financial elite require a socialist perspective that unites workers across all national borders. A new revolutionary leadership of the working class must be built in Greece and throughout Europe.

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