

SYRIZA censures deputy for questioning Greek claims of disputed islands

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The Greek Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) has expelled one of its members from a parliamentary committee after he distanced himself from anti-Turkish chauvinism and the Greek army.

The SYRIZA fraction sharply rebuked Nassos Theodoridis and expelled him from the Greek parliamentary human rights committee after he declared that the Greek military should not take action against Turkish aircraft that violated Greek air space over the two Imia islands. Theodoridis described the country's claims of sovereignty as an invention aimed at "luring the oppressed masses."

The two Imia islands are just half a square kilometre in size, uninhabited and without any known mineral resources. Nevertheless, the conflict over the islands almost led to a war in 1966 that led to the intervention of NATO forces.

Although Theodoridis's attitude is far from a principled stand against the army and the chauvinism of the ruling elite, SYRIZA is not prepared to tolerate such positions in its ranks.

After the exclusion of Theodoridis from the parliamentary committee, SYRIZA spokesman Panos Skourletis told Greek daily *Kathimerini*: "The personal views of Nassos Theodoridis are far from those of SYRIZA. By no means do they represent the party's official line."

In its draft programme, which is currently being discussed in the party, SYRIZA underlines its commitment to defend the "territorial integrity" of Greece.

SYRIZA thereby fully supports anti-Turkish chauvinism, the Greek army and the foreign policy of the ruling elite. Since the end of the Greco-Turkish War in July 1923, border conflicts have repeatedly brought the two countries to the brink of war. The Greek ruling class regularly fosters anti-Turkish sentiments to divert

attention from social and political conflicts within the country.

Tensions between the two neighbours has intensified since the discovery of oil reserves in the eastern Mediterranean in 2010. Plans announced by Athens to claim the oil reserves via the establishment of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) has been answered with threats of war from the Turkish government.

The militarily weaker Greece has increased its military spending almost continuously from 1990 to 2009. Greece leads the European Union (EU) in military spending relative to the economy as a whole, at about 3 percent of gross domestic product.

Although the government has slashed wages, pensions and social spending at the behest of the EU during the past three years, it has barely touched the military budget. It has cut several hundred million euros from its budget for new acquisitions but has left the size of the army at 130,000.

This force is directed not only against NATO partner Turkey, but also against Greek workers. Between 1967 and 1974, the Greek army exercised a brutal dictatorship that suppressed the working class and imprisoned and tortured its political opponents in concentration camps.

Even after the end of the Colonels' rule, the army remained a bastion of reaction. When haulage workers went on strike against the austerity measures of the government in July 2010, soldiers were used as strikebreakers. Since then, the government has declared martial law on four occasions against striking workers, requisitioning them into civilian military service.

There have been reports of a possible military coup since the start of the brutal austerity programmes in 2010. In 2011, the army rehearsed a counter-insurgency manoeuvre that included a clamp-down on demonstrations.

Leading representatives of SYRIZA have already

expressed their support for the army. The organisation's chairman, Alexis Tsipras, met with representatives of the army leadership during last year's election campaign and assured them that his organisation supported current troop levels and was in favour of increasing the effectiveness of the army.

Tsipras also called for the formation of an exclusive economic zone. At a meeting with ambassadors of the G-20 nations, he declared that Greece had the "inalienable right" to establish such a zone in the Aegean Sea and commence the "exploitation of marine resources in this area." The "territorial integrity of our country" was for him a "non-negotiable priority."

The fact that SYRIZA has now taken action against one of its members who expresses a different position sends a powerful signal to the ruling elite that it can rely on the party when it seeks to stir up nationalism and move against the population. SYRIZA's closing of ranks with the military came just days after the government declared martial law against striking seamen. It is a direct preparation for SYRIZA's entry into government.

Just four days prior to the expulsion of Theodoridis, Tsipras declared in an interview with *Kathimerini* that the government would be better able to satisfy the demands of the country's creditors under his leadership. "We need to be given an opportunity to return to growth so that we can start repaying our debt. This was deemed reasonable in the past when the issue of German debt was on the table. And it is indeed reasonable. But it requires a government that is determined to negotiate on this basis."

The fact that this return to growth would take place at the cost of workers was made clear on the same day, when the SYRIZA executive rejected a request from the ranks of the party. The applicant had requested that there should be no further cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EU or the German finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble—i.e., all those institutions and persons responsible for the ruination of the Greek economy and society.



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