

Greek government divided over “anti-racist” law

Christoph Dreier
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Over the last week, tensions have risen in the Greek government over draft legislation against racist incitement and state financing of the fascist party Golden Dawn. While the conservative main government party New Democracy (ND) refused to support the law, its coalition partners, the social democratic PASOK and the Democratic Left (DIMAR), are supporting it.

The law was drafted by Justice Minister Andonis Roupakiotis, after a general agreement of all three coalition partners on the initiative. The law reportedly would ban incitement against people based on race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. A violation would be punished by prison sentences of up to six years. It would also criminalize the denial of Nazi war crimes.

The law would also apply to members of parliament. If leaders of a parliamentary party publicly denied the Holocaust, took part in racist attacks, or used Nazi salutes or symbols in parliament, they would see their public funding suspended. This reported part of the draft law is directed against Golden Dawn, whose MPs are regularly involved in attacks on immigrants and political opponents.

Prime Minister Andonis Samaras (ND) refused to table the legislation in the parliament and parts of ND's parliamentary group said they would vote against it, if PASOK or DIMAR brought it forward independently of ND.

The ND-dominated parliament's legislative committee published a statement criticizing the draft law as “vague” and as “outside the scope of our constitutional framework.” The committee also declared that it believes the current anti-racist legislation passed in 1979 to be sufficient.

Claims that the Greek government's law would help

fight the growth of Golden Dawn, or of fascistic sentiment, are political lies. Passed by parties that have ruined the Greek population with devastating austerity measures dictated by the European Union (EU), it relies for its enforcement on the Greek police, which is one of the main forces behind Golden Dawn. In the last elections, an estimated 60 percent of the police force voted for the fascists.

The law will only strengthen the state apparatus, which is itself moving towards openly dictatorial methods of rule to repress working class opposition. This year the government banned three major strikes, twice forcing workers back to work with police violence.

It is not the first time that attacks on democratic rights come disguised as a struggle against the fascists. In the beginning of the month the mayor of Athens, Giorgos Kaminis, banned a demonstration by Golden Dawn on the Syntagma Square. Just weeks later, Security Minister Nikos Dendias announced strict new rules controlling any demonstration in the city of Athens.

ND's rejection of the draft legislation has nothing to do with concerns regarding the democratic rights of the Greek population. Given the racist positions of many ND deputies, the draft law could also affect this party itself; ND is, moreover, making signals to Golden Dawn.

In February, 84 of ND's 125 deputies brought a motion before parliament, demanding that naturalized Greeks be banned from military academies or join the military and police services. The main purpose of this initiative was to send a signal to Golden Dawn that ND might consider an alliance with it as the basis for a new governing coalition.

On the other hand, supporters of the draft legislation include DIMAR and PASOK; the main opposition

party, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA); and the European Commission.

EU Commissioner for Interior Policy Cecilia Malmström declared that the government “promised” her during her trip to Athens last week, that it “aims to submit the bill soon”.

DIMAR chairman Fotis Kouvelis stated that “any delay will be unacceptable” in passing the law.

His PASOK counterpart Evangelos Venizelos said, “It will be a triumph for Golden Dawn if the anti-racism bill does not go to a vote, and democracy will appear passive and in retreat.”

These positions are deeply cynical. PASOK and DIMAR are directly responsible for brutal racist attacks on immigrants in Greece: they sit in a government that organized the detention and deportation of thousands of immigrants by the police forces.

By early February, around 60,000 people had been stopped in repeated police raids, with 4,200 detained and awaiting deportation.

PASOK and DIMAR, as well as SYRIZA, do nothing to defend the immigrant workers against the attacks by Golden Dawn fascists. They are far more afraid of a movement of the working class than of the growth of fascist gangs led by Golden Dawn.

The growth of Golden Dawn is rooted in the same social processes as the shift of the government towards dictatorial measures. Brutal social attacks, carried through by the EU and the Greek government, are incompatible with democratic rights. The Bank of Greece just estimates a recession of 4,6 percent and the rise of unemployment to 28 percent for this year.

Under such conditions, Golden Dawn is being consciously built up against the threat of opposition from the working class.

The fascists can gain support for their backward and reactionary program, because of the rotten politics of pseudo-left parties like SYRIZA, which supports the EU and its austerity measures as well as the Greek government. Together with the trade unions, they do everything to suppress the resistance of the workers against the social attacks. That creates the climate in which Golden Dawn can win a hearing.

Basing on wealthy parts of the middle class, SYRIZA is moving further to the right as social tensions rise. In an unprecedented move, SYRIZA announced in March of this year a front with the far right and ultra-

nationalistic Independent Greeks (ANEL) party to demand an EU credit regime for Cyprus.

SYRIZA chairman Alexis Tsipras met already in the election campaign of last year with the leadership of the Greek army and police to discuss collaboration.

The fight against the fascists can't rely on the bourgeoisie state or its supporters among the trade unions and the various pseudo-left groupings. In order to defeat the fascists, workers have to take up an independent struggle against the social attacks, the state apparatus and its defenders like SYRIZA.



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