

Fascist Golden Dawn makes visit to Greek shipyards

John Vassilopoulos
14 August 2013

On August 8, three Golden Dawn members of the Greek parliament visited the Perama ship repair yard to supposedly engage with workers on the issues they face. They came along with a handful of black-shirt clad party thugs.

Perama is a working class district west of Piraeus, 15 miles from Athens, which is home to the Shipyard Repair Zone. But what was once a centre of ship repair in the Eastern Mediterranean has now been reduced to a virtual rust-belt, where out of a possible workforce of 5,000 only 350 to 500 will find work on an average day.

Greek shipowners prefer to take their ships to be repaired in neighbouring Turkey or Romania where labour costs are a quarter and a seventh lower, respectively. A video uploaded on YouTube shows the Golden Dawn MPs, Yiannis Lagos, Nikos Michos and Ilias Panagiotaros, and a handful of local supporters in the shipyard canteen discussing the chronic unemployment in the area. In the video Golden Dawn are heard to denounce the PAME-dominated Metalworkers Union of Piraeus, which has “held the yard to ransom and has chased shipowners away as result”.

“We are with the shipowners, we depend on them”, said one Golden Dawn supporter. In a statement at the end of the video, Panagiotaros said, “The abscess that exists here is causing all the problems... PAME will come to an end”.

PAME is the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece’s (KKE) faction in Greece’s trade union bureaucracy.

A hallmark of fascist movements is to feign sympathy for the downtrodden, hard hit by the growing crisis, based on nationalist appeals. But the rise of Golden Dawn and its ability to find an audience for its anti-communist rhetoric

is ultimately the price paid for PAME and the rest of the trade union bureaucracy’s collaboration in unprecedented attacks on the working class.

The plight facing the working class in Perama echoes that of workers throughout Greece. There is no shortage of militancy and willingness to fight amongst the Perama workers themselves, as a report by the WSWS three years ago demonstrates. However, their struggles have remained isolated due to the refusal of the unions to either mobilise the rest of the Greek working class to come to the yard workers’ defence or to organise any genuine struggle against the austerity measures imposed by successive governments.

PAME is affiliated to the country’s main trade union federation, GSEE, which works closely with the governing parties. Since 2009, the trade unions, including PAME, have collaborated with successive governments in imposing attacks on pay, working conditions, and jobs. Dozens of token 24 hour general strikes have been organised by the GSEE and Adedy public sector trade union federations. PAME has routinely participated in these strikes, designed to cause minimal disruption by allowing workers to let off steam.

Perama was historically a stronghold of the KKE, but since 2009 Golden Dawn has been able to win increasing support as the result of the betrayals of the working class by the organisations they previously adhered to.

In the May 2012 elections, Golden Dawn polled 11.49 percent in the Perama Municipality, up from 0.54 percent in the 2009 elections. In 2009 the KKE received 12.15 percent in Perama. By the run-off June 2012 general election, this had fallen to 6.57 percent.

As confirmed by Golden Dawn's strident defence of the interests of the shipowners, their real agenda is to lay the basis for the destruction of all the social gains of the working class and the imposition of authoritarian rule. In this struggle, Golden Dawn has encountered no significant opposition from the unions. Its ability to mount the Perama photo-op without opposition is an indictment not only of the trade union bureaucracy, but also their pseudo left appendages in SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left - Unitary Social Front) and the KKE.

The KKE's only response was one article in Saturday's Rizospastis, two days after the event, while PAME did not even post a comment on its website. An article on Golden Dawn's website boasted that "PAME was nowhere to be seen" when its members visited the shipyard.

The national POEM (Panhellenic Federation of Metalworkers) union federation did not make any statement regarding Golden Dawn's visit. Instead the Metalworkers Union of Piraeus (a local of POEM), the Panhellenic Union of Sandblaster-Cleaners, the Union of Shipyard Carpenters and the Union of Ship Electricians issued a perfunctory statement in opposition to Golden Dawn's visit.

POEM like PAME has played a particularly despicable role as a vital prop of the austerity programme. Last year POEM refused to support a nine month strike by steelworkers in opposition to mass sackings at the Halyvourgia Ellados plant. Apart from a few pro forma acts of solidarity, PAME refused to organise any coordinated strikes in other factories and industrial areas. On this basis the strike was isolated and eventually defeated by brutal government repression.

The real target of Golden Dawn's intervention in the Perama shipyard is the working class itself. The Greek government in alliance with the European Union and International Monetary Fund is in the process of privatising the Piraeus Port Authority, which is in charge of the repair zone at Perama. The China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company, known as Cosco, is favourite to take charge of the Port and the Perama shipyard. Cosco already controls part of the container port of Piraeus, where working conditions are horrendous with accidents a common occurrence.

Strong rumours abound that Golden Dawn is funded by at

least one shipowner. Its MPs have repeatedly proposed in parliament the granting of tax concessions to Greek shipowners to encourage them to hire Greek-only crews and to repair their ships in Greece.

A reliance of Greek shipowners on anti-democratic methods to enrich themselves is nothing new. Colonel George Papadopoulos, eleven months after the 1967 military coup that brought him to power, visited the Greek Shipowners Union and in a speech declared, "Come to us and tell us what you want us to do. I assure you that the government will grant your wish."

Free to draft their own policy, shipowners created the most favourable framework in history including total tax exemption at the port of Piraeus.

Golden Dawn is a creation of the capitalist state. Many police officers, particularly within the riot control department, are Golden Dawn members. At least half of the police in Athens voted for the fascists at the last election. Its leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, has close ties to the state. While in prison during the 1970s, he personally met the leaders of the military coup and, according to a document uncovered by WikiLeaks, was later on the payroll of the KYP, the State Service of Intelligence, later EYP, the Greek Intelligence Service.

This underscores that the fight against fascism is bound up with the struggle for workers' power. It requires a fight against the capitalist state on the basis of an alternative, socialist perspective. In such a fight the working class confronts in the trade union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left appendages a political enemy, the spokesmen for a well-heeled layer of the middle class whose only concern is how to preserve its own privileges.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact