

Manoeuvres between Greece's major parties accompany clampdown on Golden Dawn

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The crackdown on the fascist Golden Dawn party by the New Democracy/PASOK government has been the occasion behind which a major realignment of Greek politics is taking place.

Following the September 18 murder of 34-year-old Pavlos Fyssas, an antifascist hip-hop musician, by a supporter of the fascist Golden Dawn, the government moved rapidly to arrest the top echelons of the party including its longtime leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos and four of its other MPs. More than 20 of its members have also been arrested.

The decision of the government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras to move against Golden Dawn was not taken on the spur of the moment, but animated by strategic considerations and based upon a preexisting plan.

Before the clampdown, the Samaras regime faced an upsurge of working-class struggles. From September 16, the number of strikes against austerity escalated, with teachers mounting a five-day strike, hospital doctors staging a three-day strike, and a two-day national general strike beginning September 18. University students and staff also protested, as nine universities were forced shut by massive cuts to administrative staff.

Fyssas's murder in the midst of these events had a catalytic impact, sparking off antifascist protests involving tens of thousands nationally, with pitched battles with the police.

Amid growing popular anger at the acute social crisis, Fyssas's murder galvanised masses angry not only at the fascists, but also at the Greek state's naked collusion with them. Though it had previously turned a blind eye to hundreds of fascist crimes, the state began rounding up Golden Dawn personnel based on evidence already collected, including from wiretaps of telephone

calls made by Fyssas's killer.

On Saturday, the daily *Kathemerini* reported that plans to move against the fascists had been in preparation for three months. "About three months before the Golden Dawn leadership was arrested," Samaras met with "close advisers" plus "State Minister Dimitris Stamatis, Public Order Minister Nikos Dendias, government spokesman Simos Kedikoglou, ND parliamentary spokesman Makis Voridis and party secretary Andreas Papamimikos to assess his options," *Kathemerini* wrote. "Dendias, [Samaras advisor Chrysanthos] Lazaridis and Voridis were in favour of exploring the option of banning the neo-Nazi party but others who took part in the meeting feared that this would only increase its popularity. The meeting concluded that the best tactic was to tackle Golden Dawn's actions through available legal means."

Given that the European Union and the United States, working through the International Monetary Fund, have a stranglehold over Greece's economy, it is inconceivable that Samaras would have moved against Golden Dawn without top EU and US officials' approval.

Washington and the EU did not want an explosive conflict to develop, pitting workers against both the fascist thugs and the Greek state. Former ND Justice Minister Antonis Roupakiotis said last week that the government had come under pressure to act against Golden Dawn before Greece takes over the six-month presidency of the European Council in January.

A technical team of the "troika"—the European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF—arrived in Athens September 16, two days before Fyssas's murder, to monitor the progress of Greece's austerity programme. The "troika" immediately welcomed the clampdown on Golden Dawn. The European

Commission expressed its “full confidence in the Greek justice [system] to take all necessary actions, in respect of legal procedures.”

“The Greek political system has risen to the challenge and [is taking steps to] protect the democratic rule of law,” EU Commissioner Maria Damanaki stated.

Following the roundup of Golden Dawn’s MPs, Samaras began a six-day official visit to the US, during which he portrayed himself as leading the struggle for democracy against both right and left “extremists.”

Speaking to influential bodies including the American Jewish Committee, he stated: “There is no room for the neo-Nazis in any part of the democratic world, and there is no tolerance for the neo-Nazis, or for any kind of extremism, undermining democratic institutions. Fascism can have many faces. There is absolutely no tolerance for any of them.”

Samaras’s rhetoric indicates his intention to utilise whatever measures are enacted against Golden Dawn in the name of fighting “extremism” and deploy them against the working class—and with far greater ferocity. Since mass pauperisation in Greece began after the October 2009 election of the social-democratic PASOK party, successive governments have utilised dictatorial methods to smash strikes and protests and force through unpopular cuts.

For its part, the main opposition party, Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left), is offering its services in a possible government of national unity as the best means of imposing austerity.

Party leader Alexis Tsipras has spent considerable effort on promoting claims that the police force is being purged of its well-known connections with Golden Dawn and can be democratised, expressing similar confidence in the legal system providing it is “left alone to do its work .” On October 1, he met with representatives of the national federation of police officers to discuss the “reform” of the police service.

Syriza has also repeatedly criticised New Democracy for pursuing a “strategy of tension and the theory of the two extremes,” at a time when Greek society faces the “monster of fascism and [is] realising the massive responsibility of the police and its political leadership for the spread of Nazi violence.”

The government’s stance was “extremely dangerous and irresponsible” and would lead to its “further isolation from the majority of the Greek people that

wanted a clear answer defending democracy from its enemies,” according to the *Greek Reporter* .

This weekend the party issued another statement stressing its opposition to a “two extremes” theory equating Golden Dawn’s crimes with the “social struggles of the left.” *To Vima* wrote, “For Syriza, tackling Golden Dawn is primarily a political matter and the ‘two extremes’ theory subverts any antifascist efforts. To that end, the opposition party has requested a General Assembly in Parliament, to discuss the matter and how to safeguard democracy.”

Syriza’s pitch for a governmental role is that of a party which has pledged to honour the Memorandum with the “troika,” albeit on a renegotiated basis.

A government made up of any conceivable constellation of ND, PASOK, Syriza and the smaller parties of the “left” and “right” would seek to continue austerity at the expense of the workers. The ultimate political beneficiary would be Golden Dawn. It secured the support of 400,000 voters not primarily through its anti-immigrant stance, but by its denunciation of the EU, the bankers and the “establishment parties,” above all Syriza, and the trade unions for pushing through attacks on Greek workers.

Only the independent social and political mobilisation of the working class in a struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the formation of a workers’ government offers a way forward.



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