

The fascists are needed: Leader of Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn released from prison early

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A little under two weeks ago, on September 12, the Greek fascist Nikos Michaloliakos was released early from prison into home detention. The Court of Appeal in Lamia granted his application for release on “health grounds”. The notorious leader of the Greek neo-Nazi party Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) had been sentenced in 2020 to 13 years and six months in prison after his party was classified as a “criminal organisation”.

The Holocaust denier and admirer of Hitler bears responsibility for numerous acts of violence against left-wingers and migrants. Having served not even half his sentence, he may now serve the remainder under house arrest in his hometown of Pefki, north-east of Athens. Refugees, by contrast, are monitored with electronic ankle tags since the latest tightening of the asylum law and are thrown into prison if they are denied asylum. One can be certain the neo-Nazis will eagerly assist the police in tracking down and violently arresting these desperate people.

As early as May 2024, Michaloliakos had been conditionally released for the first time but had to return to prison after a month because he continued to spread his fascist agitation in online articles. Since there was a suspicion he might commit further offences, his continued imprisonment was ordered.

The renewed release of Michaloliakos sends an unmistakable message: neo-Nazis who terrorise workers and refugees need not fear spending years behind bars. On the contrary, the fascists are needed. The faster the social crisis in Greece intensifies, and strikes and protests challenge the government under the right-wing New Democracy (ND), the more strongly the ruling class will rely on far-right forces and goon squads to divide and suppress the working class. This dangerous logic can be observed across the world, especially in the United States under the fascist Donald Trump and in Britain under the Starmer government.

The timing of Michaloliakos’ release was also chosen deliberately. It took place almost simultaneously with the twelfth anniversary of the murder of the left-wing hip-hop musician Pavlos Fyssas. On September 18, 2013, in the working-class district of Keratsini, a suburb of Piraeus, Fyssas was attacked by a group of neo-Nazis and stabbed to death by a member of Golden Dawn. The murder sparked major protests against the fascist threat.

As the online newspaper *ThePressProject* reports, lawyers for the Fyssas family condemned the decision to release Michaloliakos as “scandalous” and warned: “The message is clear: preferential treatment for crimes of the extreme right and of National Socialism [Nazism]. The criminal organisation has not been eliminated; it

continues to exist.” The victim’s mother, Magda Fissa, also voiced her anger at the outcome of the court proceedings to the broadcaster SKAI: “So this is justice. The fascists out [of jail], those practising solidarity in.”

The murder of Fyssas was the climax of the right-wing terror carried out by Golden Dawn’s thugs during the years of economic crisis. Two further attacks at the time caused outrage and were examined in the court case against the party:

- In June 2012, a far-right mob attacked four Egyptian fishermen in the early hours at their lodgings in Perama, a suburb of the port city of Piraeus. Shouting racist slogans, they beat the workers with truncheons and iron bars, seriously injuring several victims.

- In September 2013, a few days before the murder of Fyssas, two armed neo-Nazi squads attacked trade unionists of the Stalinist organisation PAME in Athens; nine injured had to be treated in hospital.

Michaloliakos founded the Nazi organisation Golden Dawn in 1980 and has led it ever since. Hitler salutes, torchlit marches, the Horst Wessel Song and Nazi literature are part of its standard repertoire. Prospective members must read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and Goebbels’ writings. Its political and ideological roots go back to the anti-communist Metaxas dictatorship of the 1930s and the Greek military junta of 1967–1974.

As the WSWs has shown, there are close links between Golden Dawn and the Greek state, particularly among police and military circles. It is no coincidence that the party gained influence during the Greek financial and debt crisis from 2009/2010. It was systematically promoted politically, received large donations from business, and was given media attention.

When Greek governments—under ND, the social-democratic PASOK and the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left)—enforced the European Union’s and International Monetary Fund’s austerity diktats with merciless severity, democratic rights were simultaneously curtailed and authoritarian structures strengthened to suppress ongoing resistance by workers to wage and pension cuts. In this situation, Golden Dawn proved highly useful to the ruling elite, terrorising workers and refugees with its incitement and paramilitary units.

Golden Dawn’s breakthrough came when the far-right party Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) was included in the technocratic government in 2011 at the suggestion of EU representatives. This step—unprecedented since the end of the military junta—made far-right positions respectable again.

While LAOS discredited itself, Golden Dawn’s fascists entered

parliament for the first time in the May 2012 elections—with 6.97 percent of the vote and 21 seats. In the 2014 European election they even won 9.3 percent and became the third strongest force.

Golden Dawn's most important stronghold is within the police. In the 2012 elections, over half of Greek police officers voted for the neo-Nazis. Police continue to work hand in glove with the far-right. Their motorcycle units are notorious for carrying out assaults on refugees and demonstrators. In both the Fyssas murder and the attack on the trade unionists, police officers were, according to witness statements, nearby but did not intervene.

In the trial against Golden Dawn, which began in 2015, the obvious collusion of the police with the neo-Nazis was indeed raised in evidence, but had no legal consequences. Instead, the myth was spread that the state was now taking serious action against the fascists. The trial ended in 2020 with the conviction of all 68 defendants for murder, membership of a criminal organisation, grievous bodily harm, or unlawful possession of weapons. They received prison sentences of between five and 13 years. The murderer of Fyssas, Giorgos Roupakias, was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The early release of Michaloliakos exposes the role of Syriza and other pseudo-left organisations, which five years ago hailed the verdict against Golden Dawn as a “milestone” and a “turning point for the struggles of the working class”.

Now Syriza laments that the early release contravenes “the democratic convictions of the Greek population and the fundamental principles of the rule of law”. It is time, it says, for “democratic parties, social movements, collectives and all democratic citizens to intensify their struggle against fascism in all its forms and against fascist practices”.

From the mouth of the party that itself formed a governing coalition in 2015 with the ultra-right ANEL (Independent Greeks) and, with its policy of social butchery, strengthened the far-right, this statement represents nothing but scorn and hypocrisy. At the same time, Syriza fuels the dangerous illusion—by appealing to “the rule of law” and “democratic parties”—that one can rely on the judiciary and the capitalist parties in the fight against the fascists.

The WSWS warned, after the 2020 court judgement, against the pseudo-left's jubilation:

These assessments are not only naive, but politically criminal. They disarm the working class in the face of the fascist threat that has by no means been banished following the ruling against Chrysi Avgi. Samaras and Mitsotakis have not transformed themselves into anti-fascists and broken “blood ties with the Nazis,” but have rather embraced their policies.

Indeed, the ruling ND party, in office since Syriza's defeat in 2019, has implemented the far-right's programme ever more openly and aggressively. It has hollowed out the welfare state, attacked fundamental workers' rights such as the right to strike, criminalised refugees and driven them to their deaths, spread nationalist incitement, and massively intensified military rearmament.

Moreover, in recent years ND has taken several far-right figures into its ranks and elevated them to high positions, including three ministers who were formerly members of the far-right LAOS party and make no secret of their fascist and anti-migrant positions: Adonis Georgiadis, currently health minister; Makis Voridis, migration minister until June

of this year; and his successor Thanos Plevris, formerly health minister and now migration minister.

The neo-Nazi thugs have by no means disappeared or been politically defeated. Michaloliakos' erstwhile right-hand man, the fascist Ilias Kasidiaris, founded a new neo-Nazi formation from prison in 2020 (“National Party–The Greeks”). When his participation in the 2023 elections was banned by court ruling, he gave his full backing to the far-right “Spartiates”, who entered parliament with 12 seats. The parliamentary group had to dissolve this summer due to allegations of voter fraud, which does not change the fact that the neo-Nazis stand ready as paramilitary goon squads.

The imprisonment—and now the early release—of fascists is, for the rulers, a tactical question, as the WSWS has explained:

If the Hitler admirer Michaloliakos and his closest associates must now spend several years behind bars, after they were given state sanction to assault refugees, terrorise workers, and murder left-wing activists, this is above all for tactical reasons. The government fears that the mounting opposition towards the Nazis could become a threat to bourgeois rule itself.

The decision to let their fascist bloodhounds loose against workers and immigrants, keep them on a tight leash to intimidate opposition, or temporarily detain them has always been a tactical consideration for the ruling class based solely on considerations of expediency. In Germany, the SA, the paramilitary arm of the Nazis, was banned as late as April 1932 because there was a risk that an armed confrontation with the working class would have resulted in the victory of the workers. Just nine months later, the ruling class entrusted Hitler with the leadership of the government and granted him dictatorial powers.

This warning applies today more than ever—not only to Greece but equally to Germany, France, Britain and the United States.

Anyone who truly wants to combat the influence of fascists like Nikos Michaloliakos and his neo-Nazi gangs must not look to the state, nor to pseudo-left parties like Syriza, nor to the Antifa actions of anarchists. The far-right can only be halted if the cause of fascism is abolished: the capitalist system. This political struggle requires the international unification of the working class in its own revolutionary party—the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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