

Συνέντευξη μέλους της Π.Ο. “Κόκκινο Νήμα” στην Επαναστατική Κομμουνιστική Διεθνή Τάση

Interview with Kokkino Nima (Greece)

Editors' Note: Below is an interview with Alexis Liossatos, a member of the temporary Central Committee of *Kokkino Nima*. *Kokkino Nima* is, as the comrade explains in the interview, a Greek Trotskyist organization which split from the Cliffite DEA (the sister organization of the now dissolved ISO in the U.S.) in 2018. The answers of comrade Alexis reflect the general outlook of his organization (to a wide extend). The website of *Kokkino Nima* is www.redtopia.gr.

For the RCIT's analysis of the class struggle in Greece in the past decade we refer readers to various documents which are collected at the following special sub-page of our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/articles-on-greece/>

We also refer readers to our book by Michael Pröbsting: *Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony. The Contradictory Development of Greek Capitalism, Its Failed Attempts to Become a Minor Imperialist Power, and Its Present Situation as an Advanced Semi-Colonial Country with Some Specific Features*, November

2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/greece-semi-colony/>

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Question: Hello, comrades, thanks for taking the time for this interview! Could you first tell us a bit about yourself and your organization?

Answer: Hello comrades! Our organization "*Kokkino Nima*" (it means "Red Thread") was created after a split in DEA, the sister organization of ISO in USA. Of course it wasn't an accident, since we saw recently that ISO, the bigger revolutionary organization in the U.S., collapsed. DEA and ISO split from IST in 2000-2001 promising that they will break with bureaucratic methods but they did not. However the major disagreements were political and not organizational.

DEA's leadership was claiming that it applies a United Front tactics from 2004 while participating in SYRIZA (the current governmental party until the elections of 7 July) and after 2015 in LAE (a left split from SYRIZA in 2015, when SYRIZA capitulated to the ruling class and Western imperialism). There was an increase in DEA's number until 2014 (reaching around 300 members), but then there was a collapse.

Some comrades, members of DEA then, created a faction in the end of 2017 and we made the following criticism:

1) that we were constantly neglecting the independent intervention of the organization and the efforts to build in workplaces and neighborhoods. There was also a collapse of the work in the trade unions and the Red Net (a promising initiative of DEA, a network of non-integrated SYRIZA members that supported DEA and the left wing of SYRIZA, which had reached a membership of 150). Moreover, the local branches weakened significantly, and there was a conscious degradation of the "Deport Racism" initiative, from a significant force in the Greek antiracist movement to a mere "brandname" as it was controlled by alleged "non-trustworthy" (in the eyes of the DEA leadership).

2) that we were constantly retreating against reformism, we were making less and less criticism against it, we were relying increasingly on diplomacy with reformist allies rather than on our own action. So more and more members were leaving DEA, mainly for political retirement. The problem became even larger within LAE, a left patriotic-nationalist front, against the leadership (Lafazanis) of which DEA made almost no criticism, instead they collaborated with Lafazanis harmoniously.

Moreover we tried to explain that this is not in any case a tactics of United Front but a tactics of fusion with reformists, a tactics of "tailing" to them. "United front" does not mean working together with reformists in general, and in the medium term. It is a tactic with two aspects: united

actions in concrete battles against the system with simultaneous struggle (not “cooperation”) against reformism, with a clear position that the reformist leadership and the reformist program lead to painful defeats. Illusions were cultivated by the DEA leadership that the “broad party” could alter its course “due to our work”, “if we put pressure to their members” and win the correlation battle inside SYRIZA, thus making it an appropriate instrument for our class. But if today, that is to say in this historical context, the needs of the struggle are covered by the “broad party”, then the need for revolutionary party building is undermined.

Of course when the faction was created, we noticed that there was no “democratic centralism” but rather Stalinist bureaucratic centralism in DEA. Democratic centralism is not “unified thought”, nor unity in terms of tactical issues, but unity in action. DEA did not recognize the right of a minority to communicate its views even internally, except in the pre-congress period. Not even when it concerned a minority within the CC! No debate was allowed either in the newspaper or in the review. Horizontal communication between members of various local branches was also not allowed. Although there were always many disagreements within the CC, they were never disclosed to the members. This is one reason for the extremely low political level of our members (in terms of a revolutionary organization). Finally they expelled us against the statute four months after the creation of the faction. The same old history that was characteristic for the IST.

We must say that the financial factor was also important for this political and organizational degeneration of DEA. Especially after 2012, when SYRIZA turned second in the parliamentary elections, DEA received great amounts of cash from parliamentary grants and also increased seriously the

number of paid full-time organizers, that were paid by (and inevitably accountable to) reformism.

Nowadays we are a small organization with many difficulties, with organizational and political weaknesses but with a willingness to use our – negative basically – experience from “broad parties”, in order to redefine the United Front’s tactic in the movement and to emphasize the independent intervention and the building of a revolutionary organization. We believe that we have the potential to answer better than other left-wing forces in Greece the question what went so wrong and while the movement was constantly going upwards from 2001 till 2012 and the left forces finally reached the government, we resulted in having the left weakened, more disintegrated and devalued than ever before.

We keep a small trade-unionist intervention in few areas of the public sector, and mainly we have kept the “*Deport Racism*” Movement and “*Sunday School of Immigrants*”, which we have revived today, have rallied and mobilize greater forces of dozens activists and migrant workers, precisely because we supported them more than DEA did . Besides, the anti-racist-anti-fascist movement in Greece is by far the stronger at the moment in Greece (probably because all the left forces agree that this is a serious task and can agree on minimum tasks) and we mainly work on it. We have already organized open discussions events (for “what kind of left we need”) and we are involved in various initiatives (against racism, fascism, nationalism, imperialism and war, sexism and homophobia, as well as small-labor mobilizations) along with other organizations, trying to implement “United Front” tactic instead of “broad parties”, and the messages from this action so far are positive.

We issue a socialist newspaper every month (*Kokkino Nima*) and we have a website, "*redtopia.gr*". We are now trying to redefine democratic centralization by asking our members' opinion for a number of issues and being more flexible in publishing members' personal opinions, especially on the site. We have an 8-member temporary central committee and we do not have professional executives, our members are workers in private and public sector, students etc., which in part explains many of our weaknesses (we were educated in a quite different way in DEA). Unfortunately we have not yet been able to make a constitutive plenary and discuss about statute and a lot of issues of our physiognomy. We have organized only our founding conference and in the coming months with articles, discussions and the organization of our constitutive plenary we hope to make significant steps in this process.

We aspire to contribute to the dialogue in both the Greek and the international left. Besides, as we are in a period of crisis, reflection and goal-redefinition of both the Greek and the international left, we could not have all the problems dissolved. We will try to find and consolidate our position in the movement and the left, discussing and at the same time acting and contributing to the small and big battles of the movement.

Question: The popular masses in Greece experienced a series of attacks in the past years. Could you summarize what have been the major consequences for the social and economic situation of the workers and poor?

Answer: The labor and popular masses after the memorandums have lost on average about 50% of their purchasing power. There have been large wage cuts in the public and private sector, pensions have fallen considerably, retirement age limits have risen, public schools and hospitals have reached the brink of collapse, social services have shrunk, poor people's taxes have risen seriously, many small businesses were forced to close, several public enterprises have been privatized and many people have lost their jobs. Unemployment rose to 30% and among the youth to 60%. Today, 600-700,000 people, mostly but not only young, have migrated abroad, most in the years of the crisis. SYRIZA prides itself on reducing unemployment rates, but it is a symbolic reduction. New recruitments involve flexible working relationships and part-time jobs. The only sectors that maintained their privileges and the gross state funding (also during SYRIZA government) were the church, the army, the police, the judges.

Against all this, the people rose up, demonstrated, stroke and strengthened the SYRIZA left, especially with their vote and mostly not with their active enlistment. They believed they could change the situation. Today, unfortunately, the climate has been reversed, the world has embraced SYRIZA's doctrine that "there was no alternative" and faces the new state of austerity and poverty as the "new normal".

Already since 2012 the working class had put most hopes in the parliamentary change via a "*left-wing government*". SYRIZA attempted to strengthen this complacency between 2012 and 2015 – its strikebreaking attitude to the great strike of teachers in 2013 is characteristic. Finally, in 2015 SYRIZA signed the continuation of the memoranda and betrayed the referendum in

the summer of 2015. But the ordinary people in the past years recognized Tsipras as their sole and indisputable leader and did not have as an option of a visible anti-capitalist alternative. The non-SYRIZA left largely assumed a passive role by cursing SYRIZA and waiting that its "betrayal" would show that it was "justified", while SYRIZA's left wing essentially functioned as Tsipras's tail. It left SYRIZA (with 40 parliamentary deputies, 5 ministers and the President of the Parliament, as well as 3 European deputies) too late, without a plan, and after swallowing all the maneuvers of Tsipras in the past three years. Eventually the left people were disappointed but re-voted Tsipras in September of 2015 as the "lesser evil" (many also turned to abstention) and the other left-wing parties did not really get anything. LAE, of course, gained 2.9% and lost by 0,11% its entry into the Parliament, but it also lost it quickly, presenting the same pathogeneses and right adjustments with SYRIZA, as well as an excessive "left" nationalism in the name of the struggle for "national liberation" against the "European Union occupation", that led LAE's leadership make criticism to SYRIZA from a right-wing point of view. So they sent hundreds or even thousands of activists to the retirement, and made tens of thousands of voters even more disappointed. In any case, there was a gravestone in the resistance movement ... minimal labor mobilizations took place between 2015-2019 and they were even less successful.

Ultimately, the world was tired of the "left" austerity and turned again to the right (as the European elections /and finally the parliamentary elections of 7 July showed, which the right won with 40%).

Hundreds of thousands people demonstrated in the nationalist rallies that organized parts of the bourgeois and state

mechanism with the right and the far right against SYRIZA for "Macedonia". Ultimately it seems that a conservative and reactionary wind of change in a considerable percentage of people's consciousness prevailed – a wind that blew to the right. In miniature (or maybe let's say in exaggeration) it is the same "mechanics" that turns the revolution into counter-revolution. When people are disappointed by the left, it is easy to turn in a reactionary direction.

From what has already been said by the leader of the right (K. Mitsotakis), it will be a war machine of capital, with a revanchist character against the workers and the poor (who dared to challenge the dominant bourgeoisie plan in 2010-2015) and against anything that resembles resistance movement and left. And this is a right with a strong far-right wing within it, whatever that means for social rights, dealing with immigrants and "national issues", social freedoms etc. Mitsotakis has already given ministries to far-right representatives and "technocrats"- which represent directly capitalists.

Question: Could you describe the situation of migrants and refugees in Greece? As you are heavily involved in anti-racist activities, please tell us a bit about this.

Answer: Before the financial crisis (2008), more than 1 million immigrants lived in Greece (about 10% of the population). Mostly economic migrants from Albania, Bulgaria and the former USSR countries, but also (mainly after 2001)

refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh and others. The Greek state has always faced migrants and refugees with racism, because they needed them as cheap workforce – and the best way to achieve this is racism. In the 1990s Albanian immigrants suffered but gradually assimilated and state racism against them moderated. However, racism against (basically Muslim) refugees from the Middle East increased in the 2000s. The refugees used Greece mainly as a passage to go to northern European countries but were trapped in Greece because of various racist European “directions”. Refugee workers were not legalized, prosecuted and imprisoned by the police, working illegally and in conditions of slavery. Legalization rates were very low and slow and Greece’s granting of asylum to refugees was the lowest in Europe. Greek employers have been enriched by the hard work of migrants and refugees, and many jobs in Greece could not exist without them (e.g. in the fields/agriculture or in the construction of buildings). After the crisis, economical immigrants have been reduced (since jobs in Greece were reduced leading them to migrate elsewhere) but Greece has welcomed new waves of refugees (mainly from Syria, from Africa and other Middle East countries) due to the crash of “Arab Spring” and imperialist interventions there. The attacks of the police and the fascists multiplied. In 2016 a huge wave of refugees from Greece passed. About 50,000 of them were found trapped in Greece after the EU-Turkey agreement (signed by the “left” Tsipras) and closed in concentration camps under terrible conditions. This agreement has led to even greater repression on Greek borders and even more deaths-drowning of refugees. SYRIZA continued to grant asylum “with the dropper” and did not allow their journey to the West, since it is a fanatical defender and ally of the EU.

Greek society is divided over immigrants. In the right-wing section of society, racism is exacerbated, but there is also a serious part in the centre-left section that still stands in

solidarity with refugees. In 2016, a year of large-scale transit of refugees from Greece, tens of millions of portions of food and clothing were offered by Greek workers and poor, relieving a bit of the refugees' suffering. The EU-Turkey agreement provided for large funding for the Greek state in cooperation with NGOs for the management of refugees' lives. So SYRIZA succeeded in integrating part of the solidarity movement through professional ties. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the largest amount of money for refugees is not directed to the needs of refugees but is subjected to speculation and misuse by state and NGOs. Even today, however, there is a large network of independent anti-racist and movement initiatives that take care of improving the lives of these people.

We participate in the solidarity movement through *Sunday Immigrants School* (SIS), which operates since 2004. SIS operates weekly, every Sunday. The idea is that migrant and refugee workers can come and learn Greek for free in order to be better integrated into Greek society, to facilitate their communication with Greek workers. The SIS has been a great success, with hundreds of migrants being taught Greek each year by dozens of volunteers, it is the most successful school of such kind in Greece, and the only one that is almost always present in every major labor mobilization. Since 2004, hundreds of volunteers and more than 10,000 refugees and immigrants have passed from its processes. SIS also has a legal support team for immigrants and refugees and in recent years it also organizes free classes for Greek poor and immigrants. Its main income is a big annual festival that it organizes and an anti-racist calendar it issues. Meetings, theoretical discussions, demonstrations, and other activities are organized in the direction of unity of foreign and Greek workers.

Question: There exist significant fascist forces in Greece like "*Chrysi Avgi*" (Golden Dawn). Could you say a few words about the latest developments of the fascist danger and about the most important anti-fascist activities?

Answer: Due to a large international section of the radical left integrating and retreating after the SYRIZA's betrayal after 2015 as well as the defeats and breakdowns of the "pink" governments in Latin America, all Europeans nationalists and extreme right-wing racists have found the opportunity to claim social influence with self-confidence, enhancing logics of social cannibalism and "civil war between the poor". In Greece LAOS was already before economical crisis in the Greek Parliament, a party of "fascists with ties" which took about 5.6% in parliamentary elections and 7.15% in the Euroelections in 2009. This party participated in the government with PASOK (centre-left/social democracy) and New Democracy (Right) and voted for the first memorandum. It was one reason that gave the criminals and paramilitary neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn the opportunity to enter the Greek Parliament with 7% in 2012.

The Golden Dawn immediately attempted to take advantage of its entry into the House to dominate the streets, even to claim the hegemony in the right from New Democracy. The hundreds of anti-fascist committees that sprang up in all the cities of Greece managed to limit them partially. In 2013, Golden Dawn battalions murdered an anti-fascist musician, Pavlos Fyssas. The system tried to protect the GD and conceal the crime, but a massive anti-fascist uprising broke out. For a month, tens of thousands of people were demonstrating and attacking the fascist offices all over the country, demanding that the

Golden-Dawn leadership and its murderers should be imprisoned. Ultimately, the state was forced by the broad antifascist rage and mobilization to capture the leadership of the GD and partly squeeze the privileges the gang enjoyed for 35 years. The trial in the court has been deliberately delayed by the state and has not yet been completed, but it has nevertheless brought the fascists into a difficult position and has led to the reduction of their electoral influence and the creation/enhancement of new far-right groups. Golden Dawn in Greece is currently debilitated by the criminal organization's trial and is decimated by the continued withdrawal of its leading members.

In the last year they tried to re-emerge, taking advantage of the government's right-ward policies (anti-Turkish and anti-Macedonian imperialism and nationalism, concentration camps, deportations, turning a blind eye to torture and murders of refugees etc). They attempted to re-activate the paramilitary battalions and escalate their fascist attacks. They didn't make it well. The antifascist movement answered massively in the streets, usually gaining the majority of the society, a lot of resolutions of sympathy etc.

In the parliamentary elections of 7 July there were good news concerning GD: They stayed out of office with 2.9% while another party of "fascists with a tie" (the party of Velopoulos, ex-LAOS and ex-NewDemocracy, friend of Golden Dawn until recently) took their place with 3.7%, after its success in the Europarlament. Also a lot of members abandoned it and the only one Europarlimentary member declared his independence from GD. There is no room for complacency. The fascist far-right retains its electoral power in about 7%, a large part of society (which mostly voted for the right against Tsipras) agrees with them, there is a number of

fascist groups (including G.D.) that will go on attacking with their battalions and in the next period they will have a lot of opportunities to enhance their influence and power in the streets, given the crisis of the left and the movement.

It is of great importance that the GD is convicted in the ongoing trial, but even this will be a result of pressure from below: anti-racist campaigns and anti-fascist responses where fascist attacks occur. In case another wave of economic crisis arrives given the present state of the left, the far-right will have the potential to grow.

As "Deport Racism" we say that to stop them, a precondition is the activation of the forces of the movement and the left, so as not to give public space to the fascists, as well as our unity in action to move forward. Such a mobilization is able to marginalize neo-Nazis in the neighborhoods and lead to their weakening at the ballots. The left must highlight the criminal nature of the Nazis, but we cannot limit ourselves to just this. We must prove the systemic character of the extreme right-wing, of their nature as hostile forces to the interests of the working class and the poor. It is no coincidence that the Golden Dawn members are working with the ship-owners in Perama, setting up a strikebreaking "union" of henchmen and at the same time a job-finding agency with poor pay and no rights.

The co-operation of systemic mechanisms, parts of New Democracy and Neonazis, as in the town of Ptolemaida (where I live), is also something which must be denounced. We must also denounce the close relationship of mutual support between them and the armed forces (e.g. police). But the left also needs to confront the Social Democrats' attempts to create a

“progressive pole” against the far right. No anti-fascist pole can depend on inhumane concentration camps for refugees in the Aegean islands, the operations of the police against refugees or closed borders, as the SYRIZA government did. No anti-fascist front can be made with those who evict refugees from apartments and throw them in the street. SYRIZA’s leaders have strengthened their relations with priests friendly towards the Golden Dawn and have made common appearances with Golden Dawn deputies, especially around “national issues.” No kind of antifascist “United Front” can be built with the chosen government of Greek capital and Western imperialism, with the oppressors of the social majority and the torturers of immigrants. United Front, though, can be built in local initiatives with the rank-and-file of SYRIZA. The only “progressive pole” that can be set up against the far-right is the one of the movement in the streets and workplaces, of solidarity towards refugees, resistance to the racist policies of Greece and European Union and the demand for open borders and the free movement of victims of poverty and war.

The antifascist movement has definitely succeeded in shrinking of G.D. via a lot of victories in the streets. There are plenty of examples of cities that have recalled permits for the events of Golden Dawn due to a general outcry of society and the mobilization-demonstrations of the left. When there is a major mobilization of G.D., antifascist mobilization is much larger and usually don’t permit them to parade militarily (because the police stops them). Moreover, after the riot following the assassination of P. Fyssas, antifascist movement succeeded to lead most of Golden Dawn’s offices-basements to close, to its crisis and to its eradication in areas such as Saint Panteleimonas (which they had once fully controlled and practiced terrorism there). The last months, in the town of Ptolemaida (close to the border with the state of Macedonia, where the system has consciously cultivated nationalism

against the neighboring state) provides an example of how to deal with fascists: after targeting a member of “Kokkino Nima” by the block of right and far right, we moved forward addressing organisations, movements and unions, and we received 23 resolutions of sympathy, calling all the left and antifascists for united action in the streets to break right wing terrorism. The result was a very massive event for the town’s size. This campaign led to the far-right (of right-far right) front to be marginalized and ultimately to shrinking, crisis and splits. The big party of the right (New Democracy) and institutional pillars (Media-Municipality-Church) were forced to withdraw from the common front leaving a handful of Fascists and the Nazis shouting but no longer having a chance of success in their goal of dominating the city. In 29-30 June, we finally succeeded for the first time in Ptolemaida to organize a two-day antifascist festival, where totally 500 people participated. It is probably the most massive movement event in the town, despite the general crisis of the movement and the left.

The same days antiracist and antifascist festivals were organized in many cities, as it happens every year, where thousand people discuss against fascism and enjoy together. This year the participation was one of the greatest of the last years.

Question: The SYRIZA-led government is associated by many as a “left-wing” government since SYRIZA is part of the ex-Stalinist “Party of the European Left”. What are your characterizations of SYRIZA and the politics of the government?

Answer: SYRIZA was a left front that was founded in 2004 and we participated in it from the beginning. Its largest component was Synaspismos, a reformist party of the European Left. Synaspismos and SYRIZA between 2004 and 2008 made a left turn and supported the movement; it had very radical and even anti-capitalist elements in its program and was considered dangerous by the system, which accused it as a “terrorist party”. It was the period with the great movement of students’ occupations in the universities (which finally won and SYRIZA was the only force to support it) and the uprising of December 2008 (where SYRIZA broke the “national unity” and was again the only force that supported it). This period of SYRIZA’s radicalization and system targeting was vital to winning the majority of the struggling people in 2010-2012: the people chose a left-wing front that supported their struggles and was considered dangerous by the system.

Here is a lot of talk about what reformism is today. “Traditional” reformism is characterized by a militant and organized-trade unionized working class struggling for better working conditions within capitalism, even if it needs to go against its leadership, at least in part. SYRIZA was never in these terms a mass reformist workers’ party, although it had a very strong (mostly electoral) resonance in the world of the movement. DEA had then had the analysis for SYN about “left-wing reformism.” In general, the tradition of IST in Greece (SEK, DEA) considered even PASOK (the Social Democratic Party that ruled over Greece for 20 years before collapsing with memorandums and losing its electoral clientele to SYRIZA) until at least 10 years ago as “right reformist”, “bourgeois-labor”, degenerate social-democratic party. For PASOK, of course, this has been a basis, as PASOK was actually gathered in its lines pieces of the class that often strike and win against PASOK governments. PASOK still has a much greater

power in labor unions than SYRIZA, which strength within the trade unions are weak, sometimes weaker than the revolutionary left's, especially in the private sector, despite the fact that SYRIZA has been a government party for years. SYRIZA always had a very small labor-based base, its party base was mainly petty-bourgeois and mainly had passive members. After 2015, the overwhelming majority of SYRIZA's labor and fighting elements was thrown out of the party, with about 10,000 members (out of a total of 35,000) abandoning it, probably its most militant and politicized members (If we want to compare with PASOK, think about that this once reached the 1 million members ...).

SYRIZA, in order to have a reason to exist as an opponent of the "unpopular right", is struggling to show that it is "socially sensitive", but having accepted the whole basic framework of memorandums and neoliberalism. We call its policies "social-neoliberal" since they have nothing to do even with Keynesianism. As a government, SYRIZA has given some petty subsidies to weak social groups, while NDemocracy said it would cut them, SYRIZA is a bit more tolerant of movements and rights (e.g. LGBT), although it has also attacked several times on demonstrators, SYRIZA was by far the most pro-imperialist and pro-U.S. government in the region, there are such minor differences . In all these cases, we did not see either SYRIZA's base-membership being revolted or any leftist tendency inside it, but whenever it was necessary, it played a reactionary and strike-breaking role.

On the other hand, the workers and the poor who claim to be left still vote for it massively, and they regard it as a "brake" against the right-wing counter-attack, as the "less evil", with "greater social sensitivities." In the elections, the left-wing people voted by an overwhelming majority for

SYRIZA against the right and despite its wear it rose by about 8% compared to the European elections that had been conducted one month ago. When a movement breaks out (very likely soon, now that the right will unleash its attacks as a new government), the majority of workers on the streets will have surely voted for SYRIZA. Some say that the reformist parties today generally do not have the mass and the relationship with the trade unions they had earlier, so that SYRIZA in this sense is part of the reformist tradition, that "this is the reformism of our era." Some other left-wing organizations say that SYRIZA is a bourgeois party.

So there is a discussion about the nature of SYRIZA within us. One central comrade has recently written that SYRIZA is a degenerate reformist-social democratic, "bourgeois workers party". Other comrades have reservations, as they feel that SYRIZA has no really organized base and organic relationship with our class to press it from below and it resembles more a bourgeoisie party.

Personally, I have not clarified my views on this issue. It looks to me like a hybrid with elements from both types of parties, in the best case. If we make a comparison with the 1936's Popular Front in France, I would say that SYRIZA today is more like the Radical Party and not the Socialist Party. A bourgeois party with a petty-bourgeois passive base and few possibilities for mobilization, "progressive" and a party of the "political center" but not enough to call it a workers' party. We would also like to know your own view on this!

To make a comparison: the Democrats in the U.S. always appeared as a progressive counterpart to the Republicans (and Trump today). However, for ISO (our former sister

organization, which 4 months ago declared its dissolution to “reconstitute” within DSA and the left-wing of the Democrats ...) argued that the Democrats were traditionally a bourgeois and imperialist party, not a bourgeois workers party, although an overwhelming majority of left-wing people found shelter in it against Republicans.

The discussion about SYRIZA’s character matters, because it affects our tactics towards it. Today, the choice of one or another attitude must be accounted for mainly by how it will be able to connect mainly with SYRIZA’s voters, not with its members, who are inactive, petty-bourgeois or paid and rarely stand in any movement process (e.g. in Ptolemaida 4-5 leaders of SYRIZA participated as observers once or twice each in the dozens of anti-fascist meetings and actions we did, no ordinary member of its party “base” participated), so to discuss about United Front with its (party) “base” to strengthen the movement is rather funny.

Even if SYRIZA is a bourgeois-workers party today, this does not mean, for example, that we will ally with its central leadership. PASOK ruled since 1981, but after 1985 it has consistently applied austerity policies. Although the SEK (IST) comrades (and later also the DEA) considered it as a bourgeois-workers party, they did not call for voting it after 1996, and of course it was eliminated from central alliances (although PASOK also avoided them). Instead, they could work with PASOK’s trade union factions on various movement actions, and they did it right, when they did not undermine their criticism on PASOK. There is, therefore, a limit beyond which reformism is shifting to the right, especially when it governs with unpopular policies, so that it does not allow generalized partnerships with the leaders. This is our case now: SYRIZA’s leadership has followed its alliance with the bourgeoisie and

imperialism between 2012-2015 (with secret and obvious meetings with them), abolishing piece by piece the elements of its program that led to rupture with the Greek bourgeois and the EU, pause of debts payment and deletion of public debt, “tearing” – cessation in one day of all the memorandums, striking on the rich for the redistribution of wealth etc. The Tsipras team practically drove the decision-making center off the majority of the old leadership of SYRIZA and organized a parallel center that did whatever it wanted in SYRIZA and only accounted for the bourgeoisie. Eventually, in 2015, it was a classic social-liberal government that continued with Memoranda 1 and 2 and voted third. It expelled the party’s most militant part and legitimized the “There is no alternative” in the name of the left, put a gravestone to the movement consciously, and massively disappointed the left, putting the left on the system frame, exhausting the “moral burden” of the left (in all this contributed the inability of the other left too, including ours together, but this is another discussion). It ruled un-popularly, pro-imperialist, anti-immigrant for four years. We had a slogan in 2012 that said “no truce with the government of memoranda – no tolerance to neo-Nazis”. I think it was right and it also matched the SYRIZA government period. And I think it is true today, with SYRIZA as a major opposition. On specific conditions, we could discuss an alliance with parts of its – relatively small – base, as I have said, on specific issues, in the context of United Front tactics.

Question: Greece has still a strong orthodox Stalinist party – the KKE. What is your view of this party?

Answer: It is a party of the classic Stalinist reformism, with all that this implies: until a few years ago it supported the “theory of stages” for Greece, divides every labor movement and strike, and accepts no co-operation even in single struggles, moves everywhere alone and with only guided its parliamentary support while being super-patriotic, even criticizing SYRIZ’s government from a right point of view on “national issues”, with rhetoric often reminiscent of the far right (as did LAE as well). In 1989-90 KKE ruled with PASOK and the right, although it lasted only about one year. It was near to dissolve and then did an “ultra-left turn”, so it managed to survive. It was then that the collapse in the USSR transformed the Stalinist parties all over the world into classical social democratic parties. In Greece, a split took place, and Synaspismos was the component that followed the “Euro-communist” direction. However, the KKE, at major moments of the movement, stood firmly against it: such was the case during the occupations of the universities in 2006-7, the youth rebellion in 2008, the 2011 “squares” movement, the “NO” (No to 3rd memorandum) referendum in 2015. As a consequence, several times the system congratulated KKE and recognized how much it was a “responsible” party. It is also basically a conservative party, it does not participate essentially in anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-war, anti-nationalist or anti-sexist movements (although many feminicides have occurred in Greece in recent years). It does not fight against the church and keeps as a major representative on TV a MP (former reporter of the right and still nationalist) who maintains ties to the Church.

Nevertheless, it is probably the only mass reformist-workers party in Greece. It still has very deep roots in the Greek society as a result of the struggle against the German Nazis (when the KKE reached 400,000 members and Greece was on the verge of “popular power”). Today, it probably has about 10,000

members, it can mobilize up to 50,000 in its mobilizations, it gains high electoral results in universities and trade unions of public and private sector, and it succeeds in the elections steadily around 5% in recent years. It still mobilizes important forces even though these people (workers, petty bourgeoisie, youth, retired people) are usually mobilized ceremonially, controlled and without faith that the struggles can win. There is evidence that the KKE people is "communicating" with the rest of the movement, even though the KKE leadership is trying to cut communication ties in any way. In the upcoming moments of the movement, the KKE people participated in various battles against its leadership, they sometimes pressed KKE to participate in common demonstrations and strikes, many voters abandoned it after 2009 (over 8%) due to its conservatism and turned to SYRIZA, while in 2015 the people of the KKE by 80-90% voted NO in the referendum against the KKE line (which proposed "void"). However, in conditions of the fall of the movement, it usually does not have difficulty in having the first role in the left and regrouping its world in part, trapping a significant part of the fighters who could participate in the revolutionary Left.

Our line has traditionally been a line of unity and call to action on its base and leadership, with the prospect of linking with some KKE militants who think in terms of class unity and the accumulation of forces. And the same must be the whole left's direction today, even though we know that the current leadership of the KKE is immovable. In addition, there are several departures from the KKE from time to time and it is important that they do not end up inactive "at their home".

Question: Greece has seen a series of general strikes in the past decade. However they did fail to defeat the austerity offensive. What have been the main reasons for this? And what are, in your opinion, the main lessons to be drawn?

Answer: Basically, the period you are referring to is the three-year period 2010-2012, where there were 30 (!) general strikes. These strikes were combined with enormous workers-popular demonstrations that sometimes exceeded 200-300,000 people. It was the time when PASOK collapsed, the Social Democratic prime minister resigned and a non-elected banker (!) took over, when PASOK co-governed with the right and far right, while the left enhanced greatly its forces. At that time the ordinary people showed that classical "class struggle" is far from finished. The people of work fought for their lives, against the big cuts (in salaries, pensions and social insurance, social services etc), and "spontaneously" came out on the streets. In the summer of 2011, it was estimated that 2-3 million people participated in the "squares" movement. Another highlight was the 28th of October (National Day and Parade), where large groups of citizens demonstrated booing against the rulers throughout Greece, sometimes accompanied by throwing of objects and beating against them, while in the booing-protests the students who parade were massively involved! But the "spontaneous" is never "spontaneous", it is built on the experiences and struggles of the previous period, it is influenced by the attitude and the action of the left in the previous and the current period etc. It was therefore a period when the movement of the workers and the poor was combined with the action of the left and caused a massive left-wing electoral shift in 2012. Here, however, the good news stops.

Tsipras reformists had a plan to extinguish the great movement

through the electoral path and organize the capitulation with the bourgeoisie. But what did the rest Left, to stop them? It failed and was overwhelmingly defeated by Tsipras.

The movement, through the dynamics of the workers and the poor, showed that it had the winning ground, but did not have the right leadership. Tsipras gained the leadership of these people, not a well-rooted revolutionary left that puts an anti-capitalist outlook, the prospect of "we have the power to take everything back", to win even more and to build a society without bosses, to unfold a plan for coordination of the struggles, occupations of workplaces, moves to declare a general long-term strike, etc. The movement pointed out slogans as "to leave everyone by helicopter" but did not have a positive project, such as the expropriation of wealth and banks, the "workers power" or the government of workers and the left and the massive meetings in the Squares. None of them ever claimed that they would constitute an alternative of power nor did they try to transfer the movement into the workplaces. Of course, we can say that the revolutionary left did not have the strength to do so, it was proved to be weak, multi-divided, without experiences, with many mistakes and pathogens that made it largely a passive observer and a "tail" of the movement, spurred by "spontaneous". Even united and ready to drive a United Front tactic, I do not know if its power and experience would suffice to respond to such great revolutionary tasks. But it could certainly play a more serious role in the movement, it could definitely play a more important role in those and the later developments.

Eventually the "spontaneous" deflated, as it was reasonable that will do at some time, with Tsipras dominating with the proposal for "left-wing government – abolition of the memorandums." And it was clear from the beginning that Tsipras

did not care about a left-wing and workers government for rupture and overthrow but for consensus with the system, management, realistic negotiation (with capital and imperialism) in alliance with social-democrats. This was finally achieved by completing the right turn in 2012-2015, consciously organizing the cut-off of labor-popular expectations and the marginalization or satellification or integration of its left wing (so I refer you to the first answer), so Tsipras got the "green light" from bourgeoisie to rule. Nevertheless, even in 2015, the movement had not extinguished, yet hoped that Tsipras would collide. The referendum of the summer of '15 (when people voted 'No in Memorandum 3' despite the massive terrorism of the system, the capital controls in the banks, the propaganda of local capital, all media, imperialism, and even top executives of SYRIZA itself) showed what the resistances of these people, and how much they had believed in the overthrow of the memorandums, they showed that they felt ready to "revolt" if their leader would call them to do. About half a million attended Tsipras's speech two days before the referendum and urged him to come into conflict. Tsipras, for his part, made the referendum to lose it, and when he failed to do so, he simply cancelled the referendum and agreed to the third memorandum two days later. So we end up again on the issue of leadership.

Anarchists say that people or the movement does not need leadership to defeat. The reality is that in capitalism the working class always had, in one way or another, a leadership since it is an exploited class which does not participate directly in politics. Usually this leadership is reformist. If they do not have another visible alternative for leadership, i.e. a massively rooted leadership based on a revolutionary working class strategy, then reformism will prevail in one way or another and disappoint the masses. The movement does not go

up or down by pressing a button. The “spontaneity” of the class struggles does not continue forever, it deflates at some point if it does not find the proper leadership. If a leadership turns against the movement and there is no real alternative to its left, then there will be a period of passivity and despair, perhaps even “counter-revolutionary despair” (this is a serious basis for today’s rise of the far right internationally).

The development of the revolutionaries does not automatically take place in a period of movement, but even if it comes, time of a few days or months (“the moment of the movement”) is not enough to overcome the ultra-multiple influence of the reformists who have established a correlation for decades. To do this, a “critical mass” needs to be built before the “moment” of a relatively large, rooted and recognizable organization, properly trained and oriented. As Trotsky said clearly, if the hunter aims at the moment he sees the bird in front of him, when he aims, the bird will already be gone. We must have armed before the bird passing in front of us.

Historical experience shows that if this revolutionary “seed” is not built, our class is condemned in times of crisis to go back again and again, to lose, to be impoverished, to be bloodshed. The real goal must be to build a revolutionary party, but we are far away from it. Is it worth trying? I answer ‘yes’. The tasks of the small (and defeated ...) organizations of the revolutionary left today have to take stock of the past and their mistakes. Between 2001 and 2012, we were constantly on the rise of social-class struggles in Greece and a great political radicalization to the left. Why did we lose? Even worse: why has the revolutionary left weakened and much more divided, instead of strengthened, more resonant, with greater roots and prestige in the working

class? We didn't make it. We must now take care of our preparation for the next round of confrontation with the system by upgrading the political debate about tactics but also about revolutionary theory, modern communist strategy and plan alongside the support of existing resistances and initiatives to give these resistances a winning direction. The best thing we have to do as revolutionaries today, as Trotsky writes about the revolutionaries in France (*"Once again: where is France going?"*, March 28, 1935) is the effort to "state what is". For those who understand themselves as revolutionary communists, the duty is "sowing" in periods of "lull" to "express" the maximum of dynamics from below, to organize and give political perspective to the best class moods when the "moment" comes again.

Question: The so-called Macedonian question has always played an important role in Greek politics and has been an issue of many chauvinist mobilizations. What is your view of this?

Answer: At the end of the 19th century, the geographic and then ethnic consciousness of the Macedonians began to form in territories that were later annexed by Greece. The ruling class of Greece either tried to exterminate, to evict or to assimilate ("make Greek") the Macedonians, and by 1990 it had succeeded it in to a large extent. Most of the Macedonians fled north of the border of Greece in the decades of 1920, '30 & '40 and formed the "Socialist Republic of Macedonia" within the framework of the United Yugoslavia under Tito administration. Greece did not have a problem with the name "Macedonia" at all this time. Only after 1990, the division of Yugoslavia and the declaration of an independent Macedonian

state, the Greek bourgeoisie's "appetite" woke up to conquer the neighbor state militarily and organized rallies of hundreds of thousands, threatening to invade in Macedonia with "tanks and weapons", because "Macedonia is one and Greek" (using the "argument" that there is also a region in Greece called Macedonia, because ... Alexander the Great talked about 2,000 years ago in Greek and lived in today's Greek lands and because Macedonians ...want to conquer Greek ground). "Arguments" which are ridiculous and unbeatable, but they managed to persuade the overwhelming majority of popular masses to agree with this). Finally, in the 1990s, Macedonia retreated to Greek pressure, changed its name, constitution and flag, and mostly granted much of its economy to Greek capital, which became the first "investment" force in Macedonia (succeeding in taking control of about 20% of Macedonian economy) and one of the largest in the Balkans. (Even today Greek capitalists are super-exploiting the Macedonian workers, with a salary of around 150-200 Euros.)

Tsipras, in the last year, wanted to close Macedonian's pendency with a new deal. This deal concerned the better penetration of Greek capital in Macedonia, but also NATO's aim to block Russian capital's penetration. SYRIZA promoted this agreement as "peaceful" and "internationalist", but in fact it was a "cosmopolitan" deal in favor of Greek capital and Western imperialism. The agreement definitively changed the name of the neighboring country ("Northern Macedonia" from now on), its constitution, street names, airports, history books, statues, gives Greece the right to interfere continuously in the internal affairs of B. Macedonia, to control its airspace, to make a series of business agreements favorable to the Greek capital (which have already begun, for example, the Greek public electricity company has acquired the largest Macedonian one) and so on. The case also concerns agreements on gas pipelines in cooperation with Western imperialism.

The right decided to make a nationalist opposition for electoral reasons (The right in the past has proposed similar to what Tsipras agreed). Eventually, large rallies were organized mainly in Northern Greece (the largest reached 250,000 in Thessaloniki), where the right, fascists, church, military and police organizations, cultural clubs, football hooligans etc "fought" together "against the national betrayal of Tsipras". Macedonia today is a small state on the northern border of Greece. Their basic "argument" was today the same: that "Macedonia is threatening Greece". An equally ridiculous argument. While Greece is one of the most militarized states in Europe (the first in the EU in terms of military expenditure per GDP), Macedonia is one of the weakest military countries. Macedonia has 1/20 of Greece's GDP, 1/60 of its military expenditure and 1/30 of its military aircraft. In the overall military rankings their respective positions are 28/136 versus 118/136 (according to the site "globalfirepower").

The rallies gave the fascists the opportunity to escalate terrorism and violent attacks on activists, immigrants, movement spaces etc.

SYRIZA defended the deal with patriotic-nationalistic, pro-NATO and pro-capitalist arguments, legitimizing right-wing and far-right nationalist arguments.

But the worst is the attitude of the left. KKE, LAE and other forces of the left (apparently mainly belonging to Stalinist tradition) criticized SYRIZA from a right point of view, making criticism similar to that of the right and far-right,

with some of them standing friendly or even openly participating in rallies with all the reactionary, fascist, state and para-state patchwork. Their argument was “anti-NATO” and that Macedonia can threaten us with the help of NATO ... Full reversal of reality. It was one of the reasons why the left-wing people with anti-nationalist reflexes did not vote for this left, but for SYRIZA and Varoufakis.

Our opinion is internationalist, we defend the joint struggle of Macedonian and Greek workers against our bosses in both countries and Greek imperialism (our bosses in the two countries are to a great extent common, Greek businesses) against NATO and the EU, we are inspired by an old-formulated vision for a red socialist all-Balkan federation. Greek workers have nothing to gain from the super-exploitation of Macedonian workers from Greek capital. On the contrary, the escalation of nationalism and the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalries (NATO-EU on the one hand, and Russia-China on the other) bring war closer to our region, and the war always results in the slaughter of workers from all countries.

We recognize no “agreement” on issues concerning the neighboring people. Right to self-determination of Macedonian workers and the poor, war against our government, “our” austerity and “our” own nationalism- the enemy is in our own country. Struggle for peace, equality and friendship of the peoples in the Balkans, war on our memorandums. Stop the expansion of Greek capital and NATO. With these positions we stepped out openly, took initiatives, debated and protested alongside other left-wing organizations. One result of all this was that I was personally attacked and had my professional place vandalized by the fascists and part of the system in the town I live.

Question: What are the main tactics and slogans which *Kokkino Nima* raises in the present situation to give the workers movement a new orientation?

Answer: We try to strengthen the existing resistance by trying in parallel to influence politically. Today in Greece, there is a relatively powerful anti-racist and anti-fascist movement, in which we intervene with one of the most known anti-racist forces, the Movement "*Deport Racism*". We support *Sunday School of Immigrants* who teaches Greek to immigrants and refugees as well as foreign languages to "foreign" and Greek poor.

Also the anti-sexist and anti-homophobic movement has become stronger, particularly in the last year that women and homosexuals were murdered. In all these interventions we try to strengthen the logic of connection with the workers' movement, the struggle against the government, the memorandums and the austerity. The last year the Macedonian (but also the Greek-Turkish conflicts) dominated in the political agenda, and we participated in protests against war and nationalism. We stood against anti-Macedonian and anti-Turkish hysteria. Turkish and Macedonian workers are our class brothers and sisters and we don't gain anything to turn against each other.

We played an active role in the mobilizations of "temporary" teachers-contractors (which work with flexible working conditions) and employees in the insurance funds (where we

played a prominent role in the occupation of an central insurance funds building, resulting in prosecution of one member of Kokkino Nima by the courts, however the solidarity succeeded to acquitted the prosecuted) and we participated in most of the other central labor demonstrations or sectoral ones (with the largest probably being these of couriers in the private sector, the workers-contractors in local authorities-municipalities and the employees of one of the four big Greek banks) that were organized in the last year.

We organized some events-debates with other organizations and just ourselves. Much of the debate is about "which left we need", "what went wrong and why did we loose from SYRIZA", "why is the left in crisis", and the attempt to bring some left-wing organizations back and find a common space on some movement and political issues in the next period, as ANTARSYA and LAE especially after the latest results are in serious crisis and possibly on the verge of dissolution. This is a necessary debate, because a new anti-popular attack is coming with the new government, so we need to response with the maximum of coordination.

In the elections we called for voting for the left (KKE, LAE, ANTARSYA, preferring the latter because of its internationalist position in Macedonian case) and in the local municipal elections (2 months ago) we participated with candidates in some united left fronts, where LAE and ANTARSYA gave the electoral battle together.

Our slogans are 1) defensive ones that have to do with the period (e.g. "Against the dissolution of the insurance", "Not to the change of the penal code" (which led to lower penalties for fascists, tougher penalties for the movement, higher rates

of acquittal for rapists – the movement withdrew the last order, which was a victory) etc, 2) transitional demands such as fighting against Memoranda, austerity, struggle for increases in pensions and wages, mass recruitment of permanent staff against unemployment and flexible working relationships, heavy capital taxation and tax exemptions for the popular classes, more money for public health and education, not for military and police equipment etc., against nationalism, war and fascism, for open borders and asylum, equal rights for refugees and immigrants etc, tough penalties for killers of Golden Dawn etc. And 3) political direction slogans. Before the European elections, we had slogans such as “neither Tsipras nor Mitsotakis, for a class internationalist Left, social justice will be won in the streets, with our resistance. After the European elections and the surely coming victory of the right in 7 July, the cover of our newspaper came out with a slogan: “Black” (it means something like “no way vote”) on the right and the far right. The response will be given by a resistance movement, not by the memorandum centre left. We explained that a revengeful counter-attack of the Right and escalation of the attack on capital is coming (after 9 years of constant questioning of the “traditional” bourgeois political forces) and that the reconstruction of the anti-capitalist left and the movement is urgent.

<https://www.thecommunists.net/forum/interview-with-kokkino-nima-greece/>