



GSC UPDATE 20 (12 November 2013)

Dear friends and supporters, A lot is happening in Greece the last few days and weeks; therefore a ... bumper GSC update.

THE CONTINUING SAGA OF THE ERT CLOSURE

The sudden (and almost certainly unconstitutional) closure of Greece's national broadcaster ERT (equivalent of our BBC) a few months ago and the sacking of thousands of its workers, had drawn worldwide condemnation, as well as generated a huge public reaction, with numerous well attended demonstrations and support events. It led to the breakdown of the 3 party government coalition, with the junior partner DEMAR pulling out of the government.

Many of the sacked workers have since occupied the ERT premises and continued broadcasting a reduced news service through internet channels.

Last week the dreaded MATs (Greece's notorious specialist Anti-Riot police units) raided the main premises in the middle of the night, throwing out the workers and sparking another round of demonstrations across the country. Many opposition MPs from SYRIZA and the KKE (the communist party) participated in the demonstrations and a number were manhandled by the MATs when attempting to enter the premises. Amongst them was the respected blind MP Kostas Kouroubilis (whom we've met in three of our previous GSC Solidarity visits to Athens).

MOTION OF CENSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT:

Reacting to this latest ERT raid and recently announced additional austerity measures, SYRIZA, the main opposition party, put a Censure motion in parliament (a step before a no-confidence motion). After two days of debate the parliament voted, late last Sunday night, narrowly against the motion (government majority of 153, in a 300 member parliament, with 23 abstentions); however, in the process one of the PASOK MPs (the junior partner in the coalition government) voted for the motion, resulting in her expulsion from her party, whilst a number of other PASOK MPs made it clear that they were obeying their party whip with heavy heart, warning in their speeches the government that it has exhausted their patience.

In a wide ranging debate the opposition castigated the government for its failures to deliver and its blatant efforts to create a feeling of progress against the evidence (the government arguing for a year now that the country is turning the corner, whilst in reality the national debt keeps growing and unemployment keeps rising to record levels etc), eg SYRIZA MP Sofia Sakorafa (ex world record holder in Javelin, whom we've met twice in previous GSC solidarity visits), likened the government's recent promise of free wi-fi in the future, with Marie Antoinette promising cake tomorrow to the masses!

Sadly 23 opposition MPs (mainly DEMAR, the centrist ex-coalition partner and assorted individuals that have resigned from the coalition parties since the last elections sitting as independents) abstained and 5 actually voted against the motion. A likely explanation, in at least some of the cases, is that most of them fear that early elections would lead to the loss of their seats and therefore, despite their opposition to the government, they put their personal career interests up front.



Demonstration outside the Parliament, during the no confidence debate.

The Greek press has either ignored it, or described it as "2-3,000 SYRIZA supporters"! On this basis Arsenal has never achieved more than 10,000 at its home matches!!

GOLDEN DAWN

The well publicised state action against the fascist Golden Dawn party (arrest of its leadership, raids of its offices, unearthing and publicising various allegedly illegal operations and activities and so on) following the murder of antifascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas, seemed, at least for a while, to have led to an erosion of public support for this extremist party, (though still remaining a significant political force). It also seems to have boosted anti-fascist and anti-racist action by relevant organisations with an obvious increase in related demonstrations and public meetings.

Leaked papers, especially evidence of witnesses to the public prosecutors carrying out the relevant investigations, have revealed a very tightly controlled and highly centralised organisation (with every single decision taken by the leader himself, assisted by a small group of trusted individuals acting on his behalf). This probably explains the relative inactivity of the party since the arrest of its leadership, which has left it headless and unable to take any decisions.

However, the ... beast is not dead yet by any stretch of imagination.

Opinion Polls indicate that it is still the third largest political force in Greece (after the governing ND and the Opposition SYRIZA), with higher levels of public support than it had in its record breaking last elections, whilst more recent unpublished polls (see next section) hint at a probable resurgence.

The more recent cold-blooded assassination of two young GD activists, has been damaging to the cause of those fighting against neo-fascism in Greece and it fuels fears of boosting the conservative government's evident strategy of presenting itself as the stable moderate centre of democracy, fighting against violent extremes from both its Left and its Right.

The timing of this mindless crime (just when GD was on the back foot) and its blatantly obvious negative repercussions have led many in Greece to suspect that it was the work of agents provocateurs rather than any hot-head anti-fascists.

GSC has worked with other organisations here in London, supporting various actions and well attended demonstrations in support of Greek anti-fascist and anti-racist groups. A new British based forum (AAFG – AntiFascist Action for Greece) has also been launched to continue this work.

(Contact: antifascistactionforgreece@gmail.com

Blog: <http://aafguk.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/antifascistactionforgreece>})")

OPINION POLLS

There is a really confused picture, almost certainly reflecting the fluidity of the current state of affairs.

There is a general distrust of opinion polls in Greece (mostly commissioned by Media organisations and political parties); one of the key concerns being that the main TV channels and national newspapers, which are broadly controlled by either government or private business interests, are selective in which polls they publish. There have been no new official opinion polls published in the national press since the middle of October, despite the dramatic developments during this period. A further factor is the fact that an unusually high proportion, up to one third of those questioned in some polls, either refuse to answer or declare themselves undecided or determined not to vote for any of the parties on offer.

Up to the middle of October these polls indicated the governing conservative New Democracy party and the main opposition radical-left SYRIZA party being neck and neck (at 21-25% each) for first place and a significant decline of support for Golden Dawn, (following the arrests of its leaders etc) albeit still remaining 3rd in terms of popularity (averaging 8-11%, against less than 7% of any of the other parties)..

However more recent reports in parts of the press and established internet news sites indicate the existence of more recent but unpublished secret polls by the main political parties showing a severe collapse of New Democracy's support (mostly attributed to recent additional property taxes and similar new austerity measures) and an explosion of support for Golden Dawn (up to a staggering 21% in one poll), with some indicating GD coming close second to a still buoyant SYRIZA (c23-24%) with ND falling back to a distant 3rd place (16-18%). The other anti-austerity parties (KKE and Independent Greeks) seem to be holding on and even marginally increasing their support (6-7% each), whilst the other pro-austerity parties in the parliament (PASOK and DEMAR) are fighting for survival at the next elections, with the probability of either of both failing to achieve the 3% threshold for entering parliament becoming real.

Although these unpublished opinion polls should be treated with extreme caution, they may provide an explanation to the unwillingness of large numbers of opposition MPs (especially DEMAR, and ex-PASOK and ND defectors) to support SYRIZA's "No Confidence" motion which if successful would have brought the government down and led to early elections.

SOLIDARITY DELEGATION TO GREECE

We've just come back from our latest, fifth, Solidarity Delegation visit to Greece, one of the most successful ones yet. It coincided with one of the most important national days of Greece, the commemoration of the day of "OCHI" (meaning "NO") which refers to the then Greek government's response to the AXIS ultimatum to surrender to the Italian army, at the beginning of the second world war.

The main focus of our delegation this time was the impact of the TROICA imposed austerity measures on education and the way the Greek people and trade unions are responding to it. This emphasis was reflected in the membership of our delegation which included the president of UCU Simon Renton, Mary Compton past president of NUT and educationalists Bob Archer of the Retired Teachers Association and Mike Davis editor of the Chartist.

As usual the delegation met both senior politicians and leading Trade Unionists, as well as visited poor areas and talked with ordinary people and local activists fighting against the imposed austerity measures and their impact on the most vulnerable.

The first impression was of Athens as a city in turmoil, with numerous demonstrations, rallies, occupations and meetings taking place all the time in every part of the city. Huge numbers of police and army units as well as repeated cordoning of central parts, metro and traffic restrictions and sirens, being a part of the daily experience of Athenians.

On the education front we've established facts that indicate a massive reduction in educational provision at all levels (more than 1 000 schools closed or amalgamated, universities in crisis,

vocational education decimated, pay and conditions massively reduced and a parallel demonization by the private media and the conservative government of teaching and other school workers, blaming them for the deterioration, ie a remarkably similar picture to the one we found on the health services at our last delegation visit. (see appended a recent speech by UNITE's Jane Beech to a SERTUC briefing session. Jane was part of our last delegation and her speech succinctly summarises our findings).

We've also heard about the back-door privatisation of large parts of state education, the class bias of the cuts, the fragmentation of the traditional trade unions representing the workers and also the remarkable efforts of dedicated staff and activists to resist, create alliances and counteract the impact on poor communities. One of the themes that came out of our visit was the vision of a new kind of Unionism, going beyond just pay and conditions, but rooted within local communities, working with parents, students and other activists in local social solidarity initiatives, as the most effective way to fight the austerity measures and to pre-empt the demonization of trade unionists. The delegation also met peace and anti-nuclear organisations, as well as the veteran 92 year old SYRIZA MP Manolis Glezos (a hero of the anti-Nazi resistance during the German occupation, whom we had also met at our first solidarity visit) who delighted us (especially Tony Simpson, the director of the Bertrand Russell Peace foundation, who was part of our delegation) with anecdotes from the Aldermaston marches that he had attended as a guest of his close friend Bertrand Russell, and also his spirited anti-austerity rhetoric.

A full report of the delegation's findings is currently being prepared.

We will be discussing the feedback at our next monthly GSC co-ordinating meeting (6.30 pm Wed 20th of November, at UNITE's offices, 128 Theobalds Rd, near Holborn station) and we will be starting soon talking about our next solidarity visit early in the new year; already a number of MPs (like Caroline Lucas, ex leader of the Green party, Leanne Woods, Plaid Cymru leader at the Welsh Assembly, Kelvin Hopkins, Jeremy Corbyn, Dianne Abbott etc) and senior trade unionists have expressed an interest. Please get in touch if you would like to find out more and get involved or would like a speaker for a meeting.



Delegation member James Youd in front of the Black Marias encircling the whole of Syntagma Square (in front of the Parliament) and preventing anyone entering or exiting the square.

MEDICAL AID FOR GREECE:

Following our successful fundraising event last month (raising c£1,400, against a target of £1,000) we went to a further Solidarity Pharmacy in another poor part of Athens, as part of our latest visit and handed over a symbolic cheque.

The Pharmacy was established 9 months ago in premises within a schools complex provided by the teachers' association. It is a joint initiative between the local teachers association, parents association, residents association and local volunteer medical practitioners. The same coalition of local forces is initiating other social solidarity projects, mobilising self-help. We had a two hour long, very lively and inspiring session with all the key activists and we were impressed by the spirit of solidarity and defiance of ordinary Greeks. A telling quote from one of the activists was: "If we were just a charity plugging holes in the state provision, they would all love us; because we are a solidarity project, encouraging people to get involved and demand their rights, the state sees us as a threat".

GSC members will remember also the ELLINIKON solidarity clinic we had visited with our previous delegation. This is the first of now c45 such clinics across the country and the centre of the movement. We were impressed by the work and the spirit of the volunteers and the overall ethos of the clinic and its founder Dr Vichas (who has already featured in two BBC documentaries). During our last visit we heard that the police had just raided the clinic, arguing that they had received allegations of illegal drugs being supplied there to drug addicts!! Although, nothing came out of the raid (those who have visited the clinic would know how preposterous this allegation is), it shows the kind of harassment that such solidarity initiatives have to put up with from state agencies.

Medical Aid for Greece raises funds for vaccines for children and other vital medicines, supporting the work of Solidarity Clinics in Greece. If you want to contribute, you can either send a cheque to: Medical Aid for Greece, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1 9DX, or do a direct transfer to: Medical Aid for Greece A/C: 20307259 Sort Code: 08-60-01 .

All donations go 100% straight to Solidarity for All in Greece which distributes the money. Not a penny goes on administration or other expenses. More info at http://greesolidarity.org/?page_id=807

NEXT GREECE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN ORGANISING MEETING - 6.30 pm, Wed 20th of November, at UNITE House, 128 Theobalds Rd, near Holborn tube – all welcome.

RUINS, World Aids Day Screening of a film by Zoe Mavroudi - sponsored by GSC and UNITE - 6.30pm, Friday 29 November – UNITE House, 128 Theobalds Road (Holborn Tube) – Q&A with Director following the film.

Many individuals in the UK, including unions with over 3 million members, are affiliated to the Greece Solidarity Campaign. We support all (non-fascist) parties and community campaigns opposing austerity in Greece.

Please encourage more to Join the Greece Solidarity Campaign

http://greesolidarity.org/?page_id=469 .

αλληλεγγύη και φιλία - solidarity and friendship - with apologies for cross-posting -

Contact us at: www.greesolidarity.org

This edition was compiled by Cllr Isidoros Diakides, co-chair of GREECE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN.