

The June 15 General Strike in Athens. Sintagma Square (Constitution Square, where the Parliament Building is). From Dave Hill on the Strike/ Demonstration in Athens, 11.30-4pm, 15 June 2011

(Dave Hill was living and working in Greece, at the University of Athens, and speaking at various meetings such as Antarsia, (far-left coalition) between March- June 2011).



12.01 pm Aperia means `Strike`

The official general strike is against IMF and EU demands for a further austerity budget, more actual pay cuts, privatisation, cuts in benefits.



12.21 pm Today's Greek General Strike 15 June 2011

Dave Hill with Kostas Skordoulis and other Antarsia comrades. Dave is a member of Socialist Resistance, Kostas is a member of OKDE. SR and OKDE are sister parties in the Fourth International, a Trotskyist international (known to some as the USFI, United Secretariat of the Fourth International). In Greece, OKDE is part of a far left coalition, Antarsia. Antarsia gains around 1 or 2% of the vote at elections. A slightly more moderate left organisation is Syriza, which gets between 5 and 10% of the vote. The largest socialist/ Marxist group in Greece is the KKE, the Greek Communist Party, which gains between 8% and 15% at elections.



12.21 pm Dock workers on the demo/ strike, marching behind their union banner. On the marches feeding into to Sintagma Square, workers were marching behind their union banners.

The KKE had a separate rally/ meeting in Sintagma Square in the morning- and then dispersed. They have a strong base, in part related to their second world war role in the Resistance against the Nazis, and also their role in the Greek Civil War 1944-1949 between the Royalists (backed by Britain, the USA and the West) and the Communists (backed by neighbouring Communist governments).

The KKE in its present phase are known by some Trotskyists as 'Stalinist Reformists'.



12.32pm Today's Greek General Strike

Comrades tell me that by evening there will be the customary police tear gas and baton charges.

In fact, the tear gas started much earlier, early afternoon



12.33pm The (Greek) Socialist Workers Party (SWP) works closely with immigrant workers. 'It's not immigrants who take our jobs it's the capitalist class'



The Antarsia banner



The OKDE banner, with Dimitris Hilaris holding the banner.



Dave with Dimitris Hilaris and other OKDE (Fourth International) comrades. NO police in sight. They are guarding Parliament. We will have around half a million strikers and demonstrators besieging Parliament for the protesting against the IMF austerity cuts

(In fact the numbers was in the tens of thousands, with demonstrations, and some occupations, throughout Greece. Roads in the city centre were closed. No buses, trams or trolleys. Shops closed. A full strike)





13.28pm Apergia.. Means Strike

'We Will Strike.
We Will Win'



The government of PASOK are proposing a further cut in public sector salaries, and further pension cuts. Public sector workers have already had a pay cut of 20percent.

Fears are that the threatened austerity measures will mean a further 30 per cent pay cut- actual pay cuts! Plus privatisation of electricity, water, telecommunications, ports, and increased taxes for example on tobacco, refreshments. Parliament is now surrounded, protected by the police of course. Also compulsory redundancies, there are threats to reduce the public sector workforce by 50 percent over three years



Are these masked rioters or `thugs` Actually, if you go on a demo in Greece, it's advisable to carry some sort of mask, to keep the tear gas from your throat... thousands have them.



13.51 Tear Gassed. Stings the eyes, makes you want to sneeze.. Dave Hill reporting live from Sintagma Square .. The IMF and EU are saying if you want the fifth instalment of the loan you have to carry out more austerity measures. The government of PASOK are proposing a further cut in public sector salaries, and further pension cuts.. Public sector workers have already had a pay cut of 20percent.. Fears are that the threatened austerity measures will mean further 30 per cent pay cut- actual pay cuts!..... Plus privatisation of electricity, water, telecommunications, ports,, and increased taxes for example on tobacco, refreshments.....

Parliament is now surrounded, protected by the police of course



Demonstrators wearing face cream, to protect their faces against the tear gas



14.2

4

Jeezus, this teargas gets everywhere, eyes, nose, throat....this poster. In Sintagma Square, Parliament behind the poster.

`All for All' in Spanish and in Greek.. Solidarity with the Spanish anticapitalist protesters

Heard that the Greek PM is meeting the President this midday/ early afternoon. The Greek PM , Andreas Papandreaou, offered to resign to have a national unity government, to push through the austerity cuts. These cuts are the most savage threatened cuts against any working class in any advanced capitalist country. If the capitalist transnational class succeeds in Greece- if working class resistance is defeated, then governments throughout Europe will try to do the same. In Britain for example.



14.28 Protesters wearing face cream as protection against tear gas to stop the tear gas entering the pores of the skin Sent using BlackBerry® from Orange



14.24



14.42pm

Behind the police van, demonstrators trying to occupy the Ministry of Finance. Police firing tear gas.

The KKE- (Communist Party- strong in Greece) are nowhere to be seen. They cleared off after their demo. `Stalinist Reformism' is the critical view from some of the

Trotskyist Left.



14.54 Sintagma Square. Police retreating. Both sides throwing missiles, some fires burning

Missiles, stones, cartons being thrown at the police after the crowd was tear gassed. In Greece it is often the first response of the police when faced with an angry crowd to fire off tear gas. I saw police picking up missiles and hurling them back at the crowd.



14.56 Clouds of tear gas

A hundred yards from where I and my comrades were. This is in Sintagma Square, Athens' main square. The building on the left is the main Post Office



Tear gas works. My eyes are streaming and stinging. Angry confrontations, lots of explosions, tear gas canisters being fired, sound like canon fire
Angry remonstrations with the police- 'Why are you tear gassing us??'

...



14.49 Shiiiiit!. Fires burning, cops with guns, stun grenades, things hotting up.
Loud explosion sounds. Noise grenades and flash grenades being fired... sounds like cannon fire.

Talk of a couple of missile throwing supposed demonstrators, dressed in black, supposedly part of 'The Black Bloc', arrested by the crowd and searched... police identity documents found on them. A common tactic of police to use agents provocateurs, undercover agents. Similar to police spy Andrew Kennedy who infiltrated, and, apparently became particularly extreme, Britain's eco-warrior movement. The use of secret agents by the police in industrial and working class resistance movements is well known, for example during The great Miners' Strike in Britain 1984-1985.

Sounds like gunfire, the tear gas

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This is how the IMF defends the Greek austerity cuts.



Strike poster

TAXING THE RICH AND CUTTING THE WAGE AND THE SOCIAL WAGE (BENEFITS AND PUBLIC SERVICES) OF THE WORKING CLASS

Recent changes in taxation of the Rich in Britain

The super rich are subject to three main taxes other than income tax. These are corporation tax, a tax on company profits, capital gains tax is a tax on trading property and shares and Inheritance Tax paid when a person dies. If you have many millions you will mainly pay capital gains tax on buying and selling property and shares. The rate of corporation tax will also affect your returns because you will receive dividends from company profits.

Shortly after Mrs Thatcher came to power and for the majority of her term in office the top rate of tax on the super rich was 60%. This was reduced to 40% in the famous 1988 Lawson budget. When Blair came to office the top rate was still 40%. But after the business friendly Blair/Brown governments' corporation tax had been significantly reduced and capital gains tax had been reduced to an amazing 18%. This is of course less than someone working for measly £6 an hour would pay. Part of the reason for the massive financial black hole which developed during the last Labour government was this massive cut in the taxation of the super rich.

The Condem government's shift of taxation onto ordinary working people is illustrated by the rise in VAT to 20% and the cuts in corporation tax. In several western countries the rate of corporation tax is between 40-50% whereas the government proposes to go to a rate of 24%.

The one small token in difference to this was the rise in capital gains tax under pressure from the Liberal Democrats. It was increased last year to 28% for higher rate taxpayers from Labour's 18%.' (Thanks to Stuart Richardson for this).

The Rich Keep on getting Richer (from a forthcoming chapter by Dave Hill).

And yet the rich keep getting richer! Just to take three examples from Britain and from Ireland.

In Britain, the government's latest figures show that in the capital the top 10% of society had on average a wealth of £933,563 compared to the meagre £3,420

of the poorest 10% – a wealth multiple of 273.(from Danny Dorling, 2010a. See Ramesh, 2010. See also, Dorling, 2010b). This is the biggest differential since slavery!

Dorling also points out that “The 1,000 richest people in Britain became 30 percent richer in the last year. That’s a £77 billion rise in wealth—enough to wipe out around half the government’s budget deficit.” (Dorling, 2010).

And, as for Ireland, ‘The 300 richest people in [Ireland](#) are worth almost €57bn or more than the entire Libyan or Croatian economy. They've got much richer too, with close to €6.7bn added to their combined wealth over the last year’. No hard times for them! (The Independent, 2011).

Cuts for the Workers

In Greece, the PASOK (social democratic) government of George Papandreou has decided that civil servants- including teachers and university teachers- have had pay freezes or cuts up to 30 per cent; VAT has risen to 21 per cent and state-funded pensions are being reduced to reflect average lifetime earnings rather than final salaries. Also there is a wage freeze for three years, and in the public sector, 4 out of 5 workers who retire will not be replaced. In the private sector, massive wage cuts up to 25%. Unemployment benefits have been cut, and a poverty support scheme implemented in 2009 has been suspended. Drastic cuts in benefits for large families.

There are also plans to end collective bargaining and impose individualized contracts instead. The existing practice of extended very low paid or even unpaid internships has been legalized. Resorting to temporary workers is now permitted in the public sector. (See Toussaint, 2011. For detail on Britain, see Thornett, 2010)

And in Britain £7 billion in welfare cuts were announced in the October ‘Comprehensive Spending review’, in addition to the £11 billion presented in the summer. The attack on benefits is the most vicious in living memory- for example cuts in education benefits such as the EMA, cuts in Housing Benefit (subsidies for rents for the poor) which will force poor families out of their homes into cheaper areas, cuts in local government spending which will result in closures of thousands of libraries and support staff for the weak, the elderly, and services for children. Half a million public sector jobs- tax collectors, teachers, nurses, doctors, police, local government workers, lecturers, are to be axed by 2015 with an impact on a further half a million private sector jobs dependent on the public sector. Already, in March 2011, unemployment in Britain is the highest for 17 years. Funding to local councils will be cut by 25% over the same four-year period. University students will see their fees (and the resulting debt they are saddled with) shoot up. Public sector workers will have to pay more for their pensions, and all workers will have to work longer.

Public sector workers who still have jobs will be forced to pay 3% more in pension contributions on top of a pay freeze. Ultimately all workers will be forced to work longer

before they can retire – a double whammy since you pay more in contributions and get less time to ‘enjoy’ your pension after retiring.

The Choice

So, are we to be explicit or complicit in our servile, or self-justified, acceptance of the currently exponentially expanding capitalist kleptocracy? Or do we take a principled stand and stand up for humanity and social justice, for the rather more fundamental economic justice and massive redistribution of wealth, income, power, life chances, and for a critical- and self-critical!- democratic socialist, anti-capitalist, future? That’s the choice! And that choice has to be argued, organised, campaigned for. That’s where the party comes in. Organisation to organise anger and opposition.

The 30 June 2011 strike of public sector unions in Britain will be building that anger, that opposition, that organisation.

Dave Hill 16 June 2011