

Portland says No to Nazis

The far right were outnumbered and had to leave under police protection after their much planned rally in Portland, Oregon on Saturday August 17. But they are still using the event to publicize themselves and demonize anyone who stands up to them. They are getting help in that all the way from President Trump down to the local police.

The latest call from this rally of neo-fascists, the alt-right, and right wing militias was to “End Domestic Terrorism” — aimed not at the shooter who killed 22 in El Paso, Texas earlier this month; or the one who killed 49 at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida in 2016; the one who killed 11 at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania last year; the racist misogynist who opened fire in a Tallahassee, Florida yoga studio; the Kentucky gunman who killed two Black elders; the bombers of Black churches and women’s health clinics or any of a number of other hateful murderers. Instead, they took aim at the local anti-fascist movement.

The Proud Boys (a violent and sexist self-proclaimed “western chauvinist” organization), the Three Percenters militia group, and others began gathering late in the morning, many carrying US flags or wearing body armor and helmets. Joey Gibson of local far right organization Patriot Prayer had surrendered the day before on an outstanding arrest warrant for felony rioting but was released on bail hours later, and was also spotted at the Portland rally. Even the Oath Keepers, a right wing organization of current and former law enforcement officers who initially announced that they were attending, decided not to go due to the notable presence of open white supremacists. Earlier this year leaked friendly texts showing cooperation between a Portland Police Department commander and Patriot Prayer’s Joey Gibson revealed again the ongoing connection between law enforcement and the far right.

All 1,000 Portland cops had been called out — bolstered by Oregon Police Department, the FBI, and other repressive arms of the state. Police set up concrete barriers and closed streets and bridges across the Willamette River, in order to kettle anti-fascist demonstrators and separate them from the far right rally.

Nonetheless, the far right were isolated and obviously outnumbered by anti-fascists. Eyewit-

nesses saw about 100 of the far right at the start of their much-publicized rally, although other estimates were up to 300 throughout the day. They were met by well over 1,000 anti-fascists protesting, despite calls by the local politicians for people to stay away. In addition to black-clad Rose City Antifa (the oldest US’s antifa group) there were several other contingents organized. Even local religious leaders helped organize small groups carrying signs for refugee rights and against the far right.

Special Anti-fascist Issue

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Many contingents were called by Pop Mob (short for “popular mobilization,” a coalition against the far right protests in Portland). They played festive music to drown out the right wing rally and participants dressed like emojis, bananas, or bakers holding signs for “white flower” and “wife power” (a play on the slogan “white power”). This kind of mocking of

the far right is intended to project a fun and welcoming vision of counter-protesting.

Much of the mainstream press had billed the day as a confrontation between the far right and far left, reporting predictions of violent clashes, which undoubtedly kept some away from counter-protests. More must be done to counter the liberal “stay away and ignore them” argument. To confront the rising far right threat in this country we need broad and inclusive preparation, so that whenever and wherever the neo-fascists try to rally, our side organizes counter-demonstrations as large as possible — while also confronting them, drowning them out, and shutting them down when possible. It is important that different tendencies, despite differences in politics and tactics, were able to come together to oppose the Portland rally by the Proud Boys and their allies.

By early afternoon the right had given up, and these “proud patriots” had to ask the police to help them safely get out of the area. Police opened up a bridge and escorted them across, while still holding back counter-protesters gathered along the waterfront.

On the other side, the Proud Boys were greeted warmly by white supremacist organization American Guard. Still, *The Oregonian* reported that a group of left wing demonstrators attacked a bus carrying a group of Proud Boys out of downtown. But video from *The Huffington Post* seems to show someone reaching out of the bus with a hammer to attack the crowd first. It was only after the hammer was snatched from his hand and he retreated inside that some of the bus windows were broken.

At about 4:15pm, as the number of counter-protesters had dwindled from over a thousand to a few hundred, Portland Police Department threatened to arrest anyone not clearing the streets around Courthouse Square where they had gathered. Portland cops declared a “civil disturbance” and by Saturday evening had arrested at least 13 people.

As the rally started, Trump Tweeted:

“Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an ‘ORGANIZATION OF TERROR.’”

Ten days earlier, Trump had tried to tie the Dayton, Ohio shooter to the antifa movement in a misleading Tweet. Republican Senators Ted Cruz and Bill Cassidy have introduced a Congressional resolution to have antifa groups condemned as “domestic terrorists.” People often use the word ‘antifa’ to simply describe being anti-fascist, but sometimes the term is used to refer to particular tactics that some of the far left use to confront the far right. (see the article in this issue on origins of “Aantifa” in Germany in the 1930s).

In the face of Trump, mainstream Republican, and far right attacks, all anti-fascists — no matter what they call themselves or what tactics they use — must respond: “we are all antifa.”

It is the far right groups and individuals influenced by them who are committing deadly shootings and other terrorist events in the US, not anti-fascists. Their violent ideology has entered into a mutually reinforcing loop with Trump’s racist and xenophobic Tweets. Even before the El Paso shooting, white supremacists and other far right extremists of the sort organizing the Portland rally have killed

far more people since 9/11 than any other category of so-called “domestic extremist.” Anti-fascists have killed zero. To even consider branding groups and individuals involved in the antifa movement a “terrorist organization” is to openly side with fascists — against not only those calling themselves antifa, but against the immigrants, people of color, Jews, LGBTQ+ people, and women who are the targets of fascist terror.

What the far right who mobilized in Portland wants is to show they have the power to rally in a town known for its liberalism and groups like Rose City Antifa and the Pop Mob. They want to show the powers that be in the Trump White House that they are useful foot soldiers against immigrants, striking workers, or whoever the system needs beaten down.

But they didn’t get what they wanted. Instead, the far right were outnumbered nearly 10 to one and had to slink away. That is a victory for our side. But, with the help of the police, they were still able to hold their rally, and Trump and his allies are working to make mobilizing easier for them. “Go look at President Trump’s Twitter,” said rally organizer Joe Biggs (ex-staffer at Alex Jones’s right wing media site Info Wars, and a Proud Boy date-rape promoter once suspended Twitter user for issuing death threats against the left). Biggs used Trump’s Tweet to convince *The Oregonian* that the day was a victory for their side, saying “He talked about Portland, said he’s watching antifa. That’s all we wanted. We wanted national attention, and we got it. Mission success.”

Later the Proud Boys put out a media release on Saturday afternoon saying they would return to Portland monthly unless Mayor

Ted Wheeler “takes charge and removes the scourge of violent domestic terrorists from his city,” referring to antifa.

That is why they picked Portland. The left in general and anyone in the vast overwhelming majority who are opposed to fascism must not let them get away with this smear and targeting. We must answer “we are all antifa!” And we must build broadly for an even bigger response next time in Portland — and everywhere else the far right rears its ugly head across the country in the coming months.

Eric Fred

The origins of Radical Antifascism

“Antifa” and its red flag in 1930s Germany

*Below is a translated excerpt from David Karvala’s Spanish-language book **El Antifascismo del 99%**. (Ediciones la tempestad, 2019) The chapter explores the origins of “antifa” (an abbreviation of the German name “Antifaschistische Aktion”), which was an organization of the German Communist Party in the 1930s. The piece presents a left critique of the movement’s strategic limitations and offers crucial lessons for anti-fascists today.*

The strategy of Antifascist Action can only be understood in the context of the policy of the German Communist Party (KPD) at the time, which in turn was framed by Stalinism. With the rise of Stalin in the USSR during the 1920s and the liquidation of what remained of the 1917 Russian revo-

lution, the communist parties of the world turned into instruments of Soviet foreign policy.

For some time following 1928 (while they were completing the counter revolution inside the USSR), it suited the new Russian leaders to use very radical ultraleft rhetoric, in what was known as the “third period.” According to this position, all of Europe was in the hands of fascism. It is true that Italy was controlled by Mussolini’s fascists, but in Germany the establishment parties — the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats — were still in charge. This was no problem for the Stalinist theory; they were simply branded as fascists and in the case of the German Social Democratic Party, the SPD, as “social fascists.”

So during the rise of Hitler the KPD, in general, fought against the Nazis, but always from the viewpoint that the SPD was an enemy as or more dangerous than the fascists themselves.

According to Poulantzas: “there seems to have formed a ‘current of opposition’ [within the KPD] in 1931... which advocated both a stronger fight against Nazism... and that the main blow be struck not against social democracy but against Nazism. However, nothing was done.”

In 1932, the KPD group in the regional parliament of Baden presented a bill to ban the Iron Front and the *Reichsbanner*, the Social Democratic Party’s combat organisations (The KPD central leadership condemned the proposal). Needless to say, the occasional calls the communists made to the SPD rank and file to join the KPD’s anti-fascist struggle didn’t sound convincing.

At times the KPD came worryingly close to the Nazis. In the Land, or region, of Prussia, in summer 1931 the Nazis began a campaign to overthrow, through a referendum, the SPD’s regional government. Initially the KPD refused to support them, but after the intervention of Moscow, the party supported the fascist campaign.

In November 1931 the KPD newspaper published an open letter to the “fellow workers” of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) and the stormtroopers, declaring that “as honest fighters against the hunger system, the proletarian supporters of the NSDAP have joined the United Front of the proletariat and carried out their revolutionary duty.” On 18 May 1932 —exactly the period in which the Antifa movement was being prepared— the KPD organised a public meeting with the participation of a Nazi speaker and three hundred NSDAP supporters.

In November 1932 — just months before Hitler’s takeover, and months *after* the creation of Antifa — both the KPD and the Nazi trade union, the NSBO, celebrated their collaboration —their “united front”— in organising a wildcat transport strike in Berlin.

The creation of *Antifaschistische Aktion*

Already in the 1920s, the KPD had had a combat force called *Rotfrontkämpferbund* or “League of the Red Front Fighters.” Officially banned in 1929, in fact the organisation continued to function. However, in order to act more openly, the KPD announced in its press, in May 1932, the launching of *Antifaschistische Aktion*, Antifascist Action. The inaugural event — of which there is a famous photo, of a huge hall decorated with the anti-fascist red flag — was held in June 1932.

Initially some KPD leaders wanted the Antifa movement to be more than just a front for the party. There was talk of a possible understanding with the socialists, and in the photo of the founding congress you can see a socialist banner. But this open attitude didn’t last long.

Under pressure from Moscow, the KPD leadership quickly made it clear that Antifa would oppose not only the Nazis but also the SPD: “Anti-Fascist Action means untiring daily exposure of the shameless, treacherous role of the SPD and ADGB [socialist trade union] leaders who are the direct filthy helpers of fascism.”

As it had been doing since 1929, with the Antifa movement the KPD insisted that in order to fight against fascism it was necessary to fight against capitalism. A pact with the SPD was, therefore, unthinkable. Faced with some attempts to create unity from below, the KPD leader, Thälmann, warned in September 1932 against “dangerous conceptions such as ‘unity above the heads of all the leaders’... Such tendencies can bring the greatest damage.”

In January 1933, just over half a year after the creation of Antifa, Hitler came to power. The KPD leaders, faithful to their “theory of the third period,” gave this fact little importance, insisting that he would not last long and that “After Hitler, we will take over!” Despite all the KPD’s revolutionary rhetoric, and its hundreds of thousands of members, the Nazis took control of Germany almost unopposed.

It must be said that the SPD was not any better. The Social Democratic leaders accused the Communists of being “Red Nazis,” comparable to Hitler’s followers. The best response to fascism, they insisted, was defending the Constitution and the rule of law. To fight against the Nazis, as the communists did, was to lower themselves to their level. And more things in the same vein. In short, the policy of the SPD against Hitler was also disastrous.

Antifa against antifascist unity

There was an alternative. The Russian revolutionary, Trotsky, defended the policy of the united front; an alliance of all left wing organisations — especially the KPD and the SPD — against the Nazis, without hiding the political differences.

In September 1930, for example, he wrote: “What will the Communist Party ‘defend’? The Weimar Constitution? No,... [the] Communist Party must call for the defence of those material and moral positions which the working class has managed to win in the German state. This most directly concerns the fate of the workers’ political

organizations, trade unions, newspapers, printing plants, clubs, libraries, etc. Communist workers must say to their Social Democratic counterparts: ‘The policies of our parties are irreconcilably opposed; but if the fascists come tonight to wreck your organization’s hall, we will come running, arms in hand, to help you. Will you promise us that if our organization is threatened you will rush to our aid?’ This is the quintessence of our policy in the present period.” He continued to insist on this vision until the victory of Hitler.

Trotsky had very few followers in Germany but still they tried to put their policy into practice. One of them, Oscar Hippe, recounted the experience later.

During 1931 the Trotskyists in Germany called on the other workers’ parties to push for a united struggle against the Nazis. They specially called on the KPD to help create action committees against fascism with the participation of all the workers’ parties, unions, factory committees, etc. If they were created, these committees should be united through a founding congress to establish a movement throughout the country.

They did not just make statements; where they had a real base, they fought to build united movements against fascism. In Oranienburg, a city near Berlin, much of the local KPD had gone over to the Trotskyists, and Committees for the United Front were established. Their rallies in different neighbourhoods of Oranienburg attracted some six hundred people. Different sectors of the left participated in these committees, including KPD activists, and in some neighbourhoods the SPD as a party.

However, as German Trotskyist Oscar Hippe adds, “the KPD always tried to break up the committees.” It is interesting that the experience of the united struggle against fascism fostered unity in other areas. A unitary unemployed workers’ movement was established in Oranienburg, which led a demonstration of 2,000 people to

the town hall. The leadership of the KPD did everything possible to sabotage the unitary model. In Berlin, they mobilized the communist youth — activists who probably also belonged to the Antifa movement — to attack with clubs and stones those activists who put up posters or painted slogans in favour of the united front against fascism.

In the end, neither Trotsky’s warnings nor his followers’ attempts to put their strategy into practice managed to break the resistance of the two big parties, except in isolated cases such as those described above. Hippe explains that at the beginning of 1933, “The desire for unity existed among large parts of the working class; only the leaders of the two workers’ parties worked against it. The KPD did not want to back down from its theory of social fascism, while the leaders of the SPD played down the dangers and based themselves on parliamentary activity. We went into 1933 in the knowledge that the victory of Fascism could no longer be prevented. In the final four weeks, our activities increased in spite of everything...”

Pacts with the bourgeoisie, and with Hitler

To complete the picture of the lack of principles of the Stalinist leaders who had promoted the strategy of Antifascist Action, we must remember what they did over the following years. After the terrible defeat represented by the destruction of the German working class — the strongest in Europe — in 1933, the foreign policy of the USSR made a 180-degree turn. In 1934, Moscow began to promote the politics of the popular front. Only two years after helping divide the German working class because of their differences with the Social Democrats, now the communist parties had to ally with “the progressive bourgeoisie.”

In 1935, Stalin signed a military pact with France, then still one of the world’s leading imperialist powers. Pierre Laval signed the

deal on behalf of the right-wing government of France. Months before, Laval had met and come to an agreement with Mussolini, giving the green light to the imperialist ambitions of fascist Italy in Africa. Far from insisting on opposition to capitalism as a precondition, with the popular fronts the communist parties repressed those sectors of the left and of the working class that wanted to break with capitalism — all in the name of maintaining “unity.” The central objective of this policy was a broader pact, which was not achieved at that time, between Stalin’s USSR and the imperialist bourgeoisies of Great Britain and France.

When this strategy failed, Stalin did another about turn in 1939 and came to an agreement with Hitler. Again, one assumes that he did not demand that the Nazi leader reject capitalism.

Conclusion

The disastrous failure of the anti-fascist action strategy should serve as a warning to activists who want to stop fascism today. Sadly, in general, that is not the case. In a future article we will look at how sectors of the current antifascist movement repeat many of the mistakes of the past, running the risk of repeating the same tragic end.

Postscript of 2019

I just discovered an article entitled “For the organisation of the Anti-Fascist United Front in the Workplaces,” in the *Euskadi Roja* (newspaper in Euskadi of the Communist Party of Spain), 23 December 1933. Eleven months after Hitler took power, they continued to reproduce the tragic errors of the Antifa strategy.

The call starts well:

The European Anti-Fascist Workers’ Congress decided to elect a Central Committee of Workers’ Antifascist Unity of Europe [whose tasks include]:

3. Intensify the efforts to constitute the broadest antifascist front of all workers, employees, petty

bourgeois, poor peasants and intellectuals in the fight against fascism and imperialist war.

The creation of the broadest front of struggle of all anti-fascists, without distinction of party, union tendencies or religion, of all those who are ready to unite to annihilate fascism...

The problem is that this apparent desire for unity was not real. A few lines later we read that they propose:

5. A determined fight against all saboteurs of the antifascist united front and tirelessly denounce the support provided by the Second International and the reformist trade union leaders who have paved the way for Hitler, Mussolini, Pilsudski, etc., who have sabotaged the anti-fascist struggle and who aim to continue to lend their support to fascism.

That is to say, just as in Germany in 1932, they were proposing a united struggle “without party distinction”...on the basis of denouncing the social democrat party!

As we have seen, a few months later, Moscow began to turn towards the strategy of the popular front, of pacts (without conditions or denunciations) with the “progressive bourgeoisies.”

[Note: Karvala provides footnotes and bibliography of sources and further reading in the on-line version of this translation at Marx21: <https://marx21us.org/2019/08/26/origins-of-classic-antifascism/>]



1932 Antifaschistische Aktion conference, Berlin.

Interview with KEERFA

On September 2nd 2019 Marx21 member Iannis Delatolas sat down with Petros Constantinou to talk about the work of

KEERFA (Movement United Against Racism and the Fascist Threat) in Greece. They discussed the importance of building

a united front in the face of anti-immigrant racism and fascism in Greece. In 2012 Golden Dawn’s entry into Greek parliament sent shockwaves across the globe. This violently neo-nazi organization tried to take advantage of the economic and political crisis in Greece. The humanitarian crisis that was caused by the savage austerity measures and cuts in social spending, layoffs (a.k.a. Memoranda Agreements) imposed by the EU, the IMF and the ECB created suffering, a climate of fear and uncertainty, something that Golden Dawn tried to use. By using its parliamentary presence to shield its storm-trooper like attacks on the streets. They organized a series of violent attacks using their offices as staging grounds. The victims of these attacks were migrants, refugees, LGBTQ people, anarchists and leftists. After the murder of antifascists hip hop artist Pavlos Fyssas, the antifascist movement erupted. In the transcript of the interview, below, we discuss the role KEERFA played in organizing a united front against racism and fascism, that led to Golden Dawn’s crisis today.

Iannis: We are here in Athens, Greece with KEERFA coordinator, Petros Constantinou. KEERFA stands for Movement United Against Racism and the Fascist Threat.

Petros, in the last elections we saw Golden Dawn lose all their 18 parliamentary representatives. This is widely seen as a victory for the antifascist movement. In the US, and also in Europe, we have seen the alarming rise of fascists, far-right groups and parties since the election of Donald Trump. Many of these groups looked to Golden Dawn as a model. The stunning defeat of Golden Dawn in the recent elections did not fall out of the sky. KEERFA's experience in Greece holds lessons for the international antifascist movement. Petros can you explain why KEERFA was founded 10 years ago, what type of organization it is and how it operates?

Petros: KEERFA was founded in 2009. It was the period just after the great revolt of 2008, following the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos by a policeman in Exarchia. Thousands of people took to the streets, mostly young battling the police for two months in the streets of Athens.

They chanted: "you have bullets for the youth and money for the bankers." This was the first rebellion after the crisis of 2008. They were also standing in solidarity with the migrants. The same day that Alexis Grigoropoulos was murdered, a young Pakistani immigrant, Mazir Gioul, was severely injured while waiting in line to apply for asylum. He died of his injuries six months later in intensive care, but in essence, his life was taken that day. The government responded to the revolt by

playing the racist card and by attacking the youth movement, "the hooded youths," as they referred to them.

This racist campaign opened a space for the then fascists of the LAOS party of Karatzaferis (People's Orthodox Alarm). And simultaneously, the racist campaign to open concentration camps for migrants in two different areas of Athens, further opened the space for fascists. Today in this period another fascist has entered parliament: Velopoulos of the Greek Solution Party, who entered parliament as Golden Dawn lost their MPs.

So KEERFA was launched in this context: to stop the rising fascist threat and to fight against racism. For us it was from the very beginning, a joint struggle against racism and fascism. It is impossible to stop the fascists without winning the argument that we are in solidarity with the refugees, and that we need to open the borders and to close the detention centers. And we need to oppose the ruling class efforts to split workers, calling immigrants "criminals," "invaders who are stealing jobs from the natives," "using up the money for medicare and social services." In order to fight all this you need to unite people, the workers and young people against racism. That was the idea behind the launching of KEERFA.

KEERFA was also launched as a militant force in the street: to stop the neo-Nazis from organizing attacks against refugees, the burning of mosques, the attacks on the offices of the political parties of the left. To stop physical attacks against everybody who was different, in terms of sex, color, religion, nationality and so on. So, we were

faced with the neo-Nazi agenda which was put into practice with all these attacks. It was therefore very important to launch a campaign and a mass organization in order to isolate them and fight the racism coming from the government. In that period, the government of New Democracy very quickly formed the Pact for Migration. This was a law coming from the European Union to attack those seeking asylum, by opening detention centers, attacking the right to asylum, and giving the police the right to arrest and imprison asylum seekers, the first time since the Second World War. These were the policies coming from the top that were supported by the fascists on the street.

Iannis: So, we have racism coming from the top and the Neo-Nazis use that to organize from below. We are seeing the same thing in the US with the Trump administration, where the racism of the Trump era has enabled the fascists to build.

Petros: In Greece in that period the fascists tried to build "citizens groups." Their members tried to become popular by claiming to represent the local communities who were angry with the refugees and "criminals" in their neighborhoods, and also with the leftists eventually, of course hiding the fact they were neo-Nazis. We organized from the very beginning against these "citizens groups." We organized a mass demonstration in the neighborhoods and in the streets against them. The strategy we followed in building these campaigns was ultimately successful. But at first we were faced with different choices.

One option was passivity: that is to say that the government and its

institutions will solve the problem, and to give the police the priority in dealing with them. This would have been disastrous. The social democrats who were part of the government then, and part of the problem, pushed for this tactic. What is amazing is that the Minister of Public Order Michalis Chrisochoidis, who was in PASOK, a social democratic party, is now Minister in the new government led by the right-wing New Democracy. This is the very same person who is implementing racist measures today and is behind the recent attack on the squats in Exarhia.

We demanded that they act to stop the fascists. We met Chrisochoidis in his office and he promised he would take measures. But the local police were cooperating with the fascists, and this was the biggest problem for the antifascist movement. The fascists had the cover of the police in these attacks against the refugees. The refugees would go to the police station to make a complaint against the fascists and the police would call the fascists to notify them that the refugees were filing a complaint against them. And then the refugees would get beaten up by the fascists. So right after he met KEERFA, Chrisoidis went immediately to meet with the fascists. It was disastrous.

The other option could have been to “beat them with sticks and helmets and have physical fights because there was no other way.” We did not choose this option, to militarize the fight with the fascists. Because the fascists had the cover of the police, this would have been a physical fight with the police. We would have lost in this fight. But on a practical level, this would not have been the way to attract large numbers of people in the fight against fascism. Instead

we appealed to the local pro-democracy mayors across the political spectrum, also including the anarchists, to have a united struggle in the streets against the fascists and we succeeded in this tactic. So, in the same demonstration, we had on the one hand the most militant part of the movement, ready to defend the demonstration in case of an attack. And on the other hand, we had mass demonstrations of thousands. In the neighborhood of Nikai where Golden Dawn was able to build a base and open offices, there was a mass movement from the very start, that included the mayor and the local Pakistani community, who were being attacked physically by the fascists. So we united all these elements under one front and we had mass demonstrations where we always outnumbered the fascists. This was the tactic that led to the victory against fascism. If we think historically how we defeated the neo-Nazis today, it was through a prolonged period of mass struggle, uniting people in the unions, in the student movements, in the neighborhoods everywhere to oppose their racist and their fascist provocations, one by one.

Iannis: So immigrants are very central to the antifascist movement.

Petros: Yes. The Pakistani community was involved as an organized body in this struggle and gave a lot of support to the antiracist and antifascist movement. As a community they did not choose to just go to their embassy and make a formal complaint with their government in Pakistan. Instead they went out into the streets en masse. They were against their embassy and against their government and united with the left and with KEERFA. In 2012, the Greek gov-

ernment announced a huge operation which they called Zeus. It was a racist operation where 100,000 immigrants were searched in the streets and 6,000 ended up in the concentration camp in the area of Amygdaleza. The Pakistani community, as the main organizers, organized alongside KEERFA a demonstration in the summer of 2012. Athens is usually empty in July because of the heat and because it's full of tourists. Despite this, there was a demonstration of 20,000 outside of parliament. It was a shock for the government to see such a response to their racist measures. 600 demonstrators were arrested that day. The Pakistani community has been the backbone of the antifascist and antiracist movement, inspiring others, such as the African community and the Bangladeshi community, all the time standing shoulder to shoulder with this movement.

Iannis: KEERFA actively tries to seek the support of the trade unions in this struggle, right? This is seen as a central part of KEERFA's work.

Petros: Yes, it is extremely important to involve the trade unions in the fight against racism and fascism. The workers unions have a history of anti-racism which we saw in Greece in the 1990s with their approach to immigrants. One million Albanian and other workers from Eastern Europe came to Greece after the collapse of the state capitalist regimes, (referred to as “existing socialism.”) They came here and were faced with all sorts of racist policies. The labor centers in Greece, especially the teachers' union and the doctors' unions were central in supporting the rights of the migrants. They opposed quotas about how many refugees would be allowed into

Greece, even the main trade union federation was opposing quotas, the only trade union in Europe to do so. There was a huge campaign for the legalization of the migrants' status. The teachers, openly opposing the government, registered the children of migrants in schools. Even though it was illegal, the teachers did not care and argued that all children had the right to be in school. The number of children admitted to school was in the thousands. The doctors opened the hospitals.

So, now we arrive in 2015 and we see the trade unions fighting against the fascists, opening the borders from Lesvos to the North of Greece, fighting against racism and creating a huge solidarity movement. The trade unions were always at the heart of this movement and were very important in the fight against fascists. They knew the fascists were doing the job for the bosses by working towards splitting the unions, by creating fake "yellow unions." This was especially true in the port area of Perama in Pireas. That is why the fascists attacked the trade unionists belonging to the Communist Party who are organizers in this trade union. The bosses were behind the fascists. They wanted to create divisions among workers by pointing at the unemployment of Greek workers. Essentially, they were trying to impose reduced wages, by as much as 50% and to try to get immigrant workers fired, basically trying to destroy the union. These were really the attacks of the bosses.

In one stunt, Golden Dawn tried to donate blood for "Greeks only," and the doctors told them to get lost in no uncertain terms. All this organized opposition against racism and fascism, this was one of

the main ways we got the majority of the population in Greece to shift towards antiracism and antifascism. Even middle-class people who were afraid in this period of crisis, shifted towards us. There was a general radicalization and it explains why we have a big political left turn in Greece. The fascists tried to stop this move to the left but they were defeated. If you want to understand how Syriza came to power, it was because of these struggles. The workers' struggle, the antifascist and antiracist struggles, the struggles against the police. The workers movement was very strong, in the thousands, to isolate Golden Dawn even when they managed to get 500,000 votes. Golden Dawn could not mobilize more than 1,000 members in the streets, even in the largest nationalist demonstrations. In other demos, they were always isolated and stopped by the antifascists, they could not get on the streets or the squares. They could not even get a hotel to have their closed meetings. So, it is clearly the power of the workers unions that was the best instrument to smash the fascists.

Iannis: We all understand why we cannot stop fascism in the courts. However, the Golden Dawn trial has played a very big role in their demise. Can you tell us a little about this?

Petros: It was very important for us to demand that there would be a civil prosecution in the trial of Golden Dawn. In Greece, this is not automatic. The state pretended to prosecute Golden Dawn. But we managed to change this. We brought to court the lawyers of the antifascist movement "Jail Golden Dawn," of the family of Pavlos Fyssas, of the trade unionists of the Communist Party, all in court together. The voices of these lawyers

did not allow the state to control how the trial developed. But it also placed full responsibility on the state and especially on the police. The lawyers exposed the relationship between the police and the fascists. And this was a very important part of the trial. The fascists pretend they are against the system, but the system uses the fascists against the workers, the youth, the left and so on. It was therefore extremely important that the trial created a big problem for the neo-Nazis' strategy. What they tried to do was use their parliamentary presence to hide the street battalions and hide their true character. They tried to use the political crisis in order to gain mass support. They tried to turn the votes for them into militant street actions against the migrants and the left and so on. So the trial is very important because they are facing accusations of running a criminal organization [Iannis: because they were using their offices to stage these attacks and weapons were found there]. And if they wanted to try to win in court, they had to stop the physical attacks on the street. So, the antifascist movement created a big contradiction in their ranks which the leadership of Golden Dawn tried to contain, but splits ensued. Attacks kept exposing Golden Dawn as neo-Nazis. The four years of the trial have exposed them as a criminal organization in the eyes of millions. That is why they ended up losing more than 200,000 votes in the last elections. And this is very important to understand, not all their voters were neo-Nazis. This was proven in these elections. They were petit bourgeois who were confused. People who were not part of the movements nor the trade unions and who were easily won by the neo-Nazis' racism and

demagoguery. So, the argument about not voting for the murderers of Pavlos Fyssas was very important in being able to split them. Therefore, the trial played a very important role in exposing the relationship between the neo-Nazis, the police and the system.

When they are in court, the neo-Nazis deny being part of these attacks or having any knowledge of them, thereby showing themselves to be such cowards.

Iannis: Golden Dawn tried to distance itself from the murder of Shezad Luqman and also of Pavlos Fyssas. The trial has proved that their members were responsible and that the order to kill Pavlos Fyssas goes to the top of the Golden Dawn leadership.

Petros: The work the lawyers did in this trial is very important. We managed to bring down the most important neo-Nazi party internationally. We are very proud of that. But of course, that is not the end of the road now. The new government of New Democracy is opening up that space again. Fortunately, we now have a lot of experience on how to fight this, with the strong antiracist and antifascist movement we have built. We are optimistic that in the new round, it will be the final one to keep them down.

Iannis: So antiracism and antifascism are very much connected.

Petros: For us the fight against islamophobia, the fight against homophobia, the fight against all this campaign of “criminality,” “drug addicts” (often referred to as “poor devils”) we have to connect with all these fights because neoliberalism is in crisis. It is showing its ugly face because it cannot deliver. For example, Donald Trump is opening the door to the neo-

Nazis and the fascists. And that is why the movement in the USA is very important for us. We do not count the movement based on the number of demonstrators. We have to look at it from a larger historical dimension. Millions have demonstrated against Trump since his inauguration. And this has to do with the family separation at the border. So millions are against racism. For us it is very important for the antiracist, antifascist and even for the anticapitalist movement to get hold of this picture and not to lose it.

Iannis: Last thing, Petros. What advice would you give to antiracist and antifascist activists in Europe and the US, having had this tremendous victory against Golden Dawn, the model for neo-Nazis all over the world? You in Greece were able to put an end to that nightmare.

Petros: First of all, we are proud because we are part of an international movement. For us the victory against the neo-Nazis in Greece would not have been possible without the support of the movements in the US, in the UK, in Europe during the period of the memoranda (EU/ IMF/ ECB imposed austerity measures) in Greece. And in the period of the revolt over the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos. Also, in 2015 the huge solidarity movement around Europe, to open the border. It is not the case that we would advise some other movements.

We are part of the same movement. How we defeated the neo-Nazis, we believe it to be important. When Golden Dawn entered parliament, there was a lot of panic. We did not panic because we did not underestimate them. We started KEERFA more than 10

years ago because we saw that there was a fascist threat. At the time Golden Dawn was 0.12% electorally. They did not become a threat because of the votes they gathered. The reality was they grew because of the crisis of the system, the crisis of capitalism, the political crisis and the collapse of the traditional parties around Europe such as the Social-Democratic PASOK, and right-wing parties. It opened the space for the far-right parties, and for Trump in the US. And if you do not open, as a priority, a united front against fascism and racism and for open borders, then you will be isolated. We think this is what happened in France. It is the other example we have to examine. Because the French movement is historic when it comes to workers resistance. But there is no organized resistance against fascism and racism. And this opens the space for Le Pen. Then look at what happened in Austria, that is a very good example. There the antifascists and antiracists who took the initiative managed to kick the fascist Freedom Party out of government. I think KEERFA is not the only one that succeeded. There is a huge movement that can win victories. How was it possible to save Carola Rackete, the captain of the rescue ship from prosecution? Because there was a solidarity movement in Europe organized all the way from Italy to Austria to Germany.

For us it is very important that there is international coordination. On October 12, we are holding in Athens our yearly international meeting to which are invited US organizations, such as United Against Racism and Fascism, NYC and Washington D.C. United Against Hate. It will be a very important moment. And then on the

20th of October there is an international meeting in London. We are going to coordinate. For March 21 2020, the UN day against racism and discrimination we have set up international coordination. We have learned a lot from the experience of other movements, especially from the movement in the US. One thing I want to advise the comrades and friends in the US is not to underestimate the power of their movement. [Iannis: the huge demonstrations against Trump, family separations, etc...]. After all, for us it is one of the biggest inspirations. It is important not to lose ourselves in this period and to hold on to this wonderful picture.



Petros Constantinou

Resisting the Rise of the Fascist Threat

“The need to fight back against the far right and its fascist components has taken a new urgency in recent years. In country after country we have seen electoral successes for political formations with more or less open links to neo-nazi or “post-fascist” parties. The victory of Bolsonaro in Brazil helped by the presence of Donald Trump at the White House in the US has given added impetus to this process that has been at work in Europe for a longer time. LePen- father and daughter in France, the FPÖ in Austria, Wilders in Holland are long standing examples. More recent is the emergence of AfD in Germany and the possibilities offered to fascists by the rise of Salvini in Italy. We have seen also attempts to translate such successes into street-fighting gangs organizing racist attacks along more openly fascist traditions.

“Fortunately, there has also been a rising fightback. Every sexist and racist provocation by Trump has met with explosions of anger by women, Blacks and a rising left radicalization among the young and the not-so-young. In Germany, mass demonstrations in Chemnitz, Berlin and recently in Dresden have responded magnificently. In Austria, the FPÖ participation in the government collapsed amid scandals. In Britain, the traditions of the Anti Nazi League live on. In Greece, Golden Dawn is disintegrating.

“All this provides a rich background for the debates on the Left over strategy and tactics in the antifascist movement...”

Continue Reading Panos Garganas, “The fight against fascism,” a guest post from Greece, online.

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