

The 'indignados' movement in Greece

What is at stake?

Over the last few months, the immediate concern for the European Union and the Greek state has been to finalise the terms for the additional financing—12 billion euros—required to service the Greek state's debt repayments. The Medium Term Economic Program (the updated version of the 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the EU-IMF-ECB 'Troika') was finally voted for on June 29. Further funding of about 30 billion euros will be required next year, and even more in 2013. The Greek state missed budget targets set last year when the IMF and Eurozone provided a 110 billion euro loan package, to be delivered in tranches. The centrepiece of the new bailout package is a privatisation drive that is predicted to raise 50 billion euros by 2015. State-owned power and water companies, ports, banks, the former telecommunications monopoly (OTE), the train operator, and other companies such as OPAP, the largest European lottery and sports betting firm, will be included in the sell-off, which means an even greater reduction in the indirect wage and the deterioration of living conditions in general, as well as a permanent and substantial loss of revenue for the State budget, 'necessitating' an even bigger deterioration in living standards and so on. In addition, there will be further spending cuts—more than 6 billion euros within twelve months, equivalent to 2.8 percent of Greek GDP—and regressive tax hikes targeting the reproduction of the domestic working class. This will mean wage cuts up to 30%. The trade-union confederation of public sector workers—ADEDY—estimated that the average overall cut initiated by last year's package of measures would reach 40–45% of public sector workers' salaries by the end of the present year.

This is the continuation of a *horizontal* attack against the wage—the level of the reproduction of the working class—which started in 2009. It also encompasses various petit-bourgeois and wage earning middle strata, in particular through tax hikes and the opening up of protected professions, measures which tendentially change the structure of Greek society (namely, its overgrown petit-bourgeois sector). The state subsidies for the survival of the surplus workforce tend to disappear and the result is the proliferation of informal labour and poverty. Proletarians (and rapidly proletarianised middle and petit-bourgeois strata) have no other option but to work, mostly informally, in order to survive, and at the same time find it impossible to find a job or gain an income that would cover the cost of reproduction of their labour power. The official unemployment rate in March 2011 was 16.2% compared to 11.6% in March 2010 and 15.9% in February 2011, while it was 42.5% for 15–24 year-olds and 22.6% for 25–34 year-olds. Capital declares that it cannot afford the survival of the proletariat and makes it clear that a significant part of the latter is useless (in terms of the valorisation of capital), and more importantly, that the desired recovery does not include any re-integration into production of this over-abundant part of the proletariat.

The ‘Greek issue’ is not a Greek problem. Alan Greenspan commented on June 17 that ‘Greece’s debt crisis has the potential to push the US into another recession’. A couple of weeks earlier, ECB executive board member Lorenzo Bini Smaghi said to the *Financial Times* that ‘a debt restructuring, or exiting the euro, would be like the death penalty’, adding that ‘anyone who imagined the impact would be containable are like those who in mid-September 2008 were saying the markets had been fully prepared for the failure of Lehman Brothers’. On June 22, Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke warned:

If there were a failure to resolve that (Greek debt) situation it would pose threats to the European financial system, the global financial system, and to European political unity.

The different approaches between the various European national capitalist formations apparently reflect their respective interests in a period of intensified inter-capitalist competition:

The ECB and the French banks are among the worst exposed to a Greek debt restructuring, while the German banks would take a far smaller ‘hair-cut’, and moreover would likely expect to be subsidised for any losses by the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel. The perceived advantage in a Greek restructuring as far as Germany and its smaller Eurozone allies are concerned is that the move could potentially reduce the amount of their public funds funnelled into the banks of France and other rival powers.¹

So the various competing fractions of capital seek to prevent and, if that proves impossible, effectively contain the shock waves that a potential default of the Greek state will send through the global financial system. And even more so, as it is not only Greece; Portugal, Ireland and Spain are ready to follow (not to mention the huge accumulated public debt of the USA and UK). Such a development would cause an even more acute plunge in the global economy, transforming the current sovereign debt crisis into a major currency crisis and, ultimately, a crisis of value. Essentially, what is at stake in the present moment is the endeavour on the part of the bourgeoisie to avoid a massive devaluation of financial capital, that is to say, to halt the destructive re-affirmation of the law of value within the capitalist crisis. This is, in other words, the endeavour to preserve the present mode of global accumulation by accelerating the core dynamics of restructured capitalism itself: attack against the wage and all the guarantees of the reproduction of the working class, de-legitimisation of the negotiation of the price of labour power, precarisation, zoning of global capitalist accumulation and intensified competition between the various peripheries of accumulation, further financialisation and the effort to valorise financial capital (mainly in sectors associated with the reproduction of labour power and the distribution of produced surplus value—exploitation of public assets, restructuring of pension schemes, etc). However,

¹ Patrick O’Connor, *World Socialist Website*, 31 May 2011.

this effort to increase the rate of surplus value (rate of exploitation) accelerates at the same time all the contradictions in the above dynamics—contradictions that ended up in the current crisis—making them even more explosive.

The ‘indignados’ in Greece

On May 25, in a series of demonstrations and gatherings in various Greek cities, tens of thousands took to the streets to make a demand for ‘all politicians to go’. In Athens, approximately 20,000 took to Syntagma square (the central square opposite Parliament House); in Thessaloniki, approximately 5,000 gathered in front of the White Tower. A lot of people gathered in Patras, Volos, Chania, Ioannina, Larisa and other cities. In the notes that follow, the focus will be on Athens, as this is where the bulk of the events took place and the dynamics/limits of this movement were most evident.

Below, we cite some minutes of the first open assembly held at Syntagma square on May 25, which are quite representative of the mood prevalent among the protesters:

Any politician who commits injustices, anyone not respecting popular demands, must go to their home or to prison. Their democracy can guarantee neither equality nor justice.

We should not be satisfied with being consumers or customers, we should be satisfied with being good and responsible citizens.

We should look at this issue—of our robbed lives—globally. We should connect with anything similar happening across the world.

It is not only the politicians who are to blame, it is all of us with our individualistic behaviour.

We must continue with consistency the revolts of the Arabic world, to lift ourselves above homelands and nations.

We must start formulating demands; for politics to change, for the government to go—let’s co-shape our own proposals.

The health system collapses; there are no more disposable materials; people in hospitals are in danger; they [politicians] are abandoning us.

Democracy began from here, in Athens. Politics is not something bad. To improve it, let's take it back into our own hands.

The problems are common and they are what unites us. We should not allow [political] banners, or whatever chooses to divide us.

The Spanish people gave us the idea and the cue. We must co-ordinate with the rest of the debt-ridden South, we must mobilise. The Spanish people have shown us the way.

They slander civil servants, teachers, lecturers, doctors. Justice is not the 500 euro [salaries]. They deprive us of dignity.

Greece is at the edge of the cliff and the money of the country is already abroad. They robbed us, and continue to do so.²

And this is the resolution by one of the early open assemblies at Syntagma square:

For a long time now, decisions have been made for us, without us.

We are workers, unemployed, pensioners, youth who came to Syntagma to struggle for our lives and our futures.

We are here because we know that the solution to our problems can only come from us.

We invite all Athenians, the workers, the unemployed and the youth to Syntagma, and the entire society to fill up the squares and to take life into their hands.

There, in the squares, we shall co-shape all our demands.

We call all workers who will be striking in the coming period to end up and remain at Syntagma.

We will not leave the squares before those who led us here leave: Governments, the Troika, Banks, Memorandums and everyone who exploits us.

We say that the debt is not ours.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOW!

EQUALITY—JUSTICE—DIGNITY!

The only defeated struggle is the one that was never fought!³

² Minutes from the Open Assembly of Syntagma Square, 25 May 2011. <http://www.occupiedlondon.org>.

³ Resolution by the Popular Assembly of Syntagma square, 28 May 2011.

For more than a month, a few thousand people had been gathering daily in Syntagma square. The square was occupied 24/7, but the bulk of the protesters would turn up in the evening, after work, which was when the assemblies took place as well. On weekends, the number of demonstrators multiplied, peaking at hundreds of thousands on June 5. It was a diverse, inter-class crowd of workers (to a large extent public sector workers), unemployed, students, pensioners, self-employed, shopkeepers, and other petit-bourgeois strata. The social composition of the crowd also had a spatial expression in Syntagma square: in the 'upper part' of the square, closer to Parliament House, it was much more petit-bourgeois—this is where one would see the majority of Greek flags and some (far) rightist groups—while in the 'lower part' the presence of young students, workers and unemployed was far more significant. Interestingly, the presence of high school kids, immigrants, and lumpen proletarians—who were involved in the most aggressive actions during the December 2008 riots—was not significant. However, the much broader composition and the more massive character of this movement indicate the deepening of a generalised social crisis in the time that has passed since late 2008. In addition, unlike December 2008, the daily presence of this motley crowd in the centre of Athens and other cities did not cause any major disruption to 'business as usual'. It remained far from practically upsetting the distribution of commodities/circulation of capital, not to mention production. For some shops, especially food companies and cafes, 'indignados' were a blessing. It did not produce any questioning of social roles within the division of labour either: lawyers would participate in committees intended to question the legitimacy of the austerity programme, doctors would offer their services for free, the unemployed would clean the square, and the homeless would be satisfied at having found a temporary substitute for charity.

As is evident from some of the minutes cited above (and obviously from its very name), the 'indignados' movement in Greece was inspired by the Spanish 'indignados' and the revolts in North Africa, especially Egypt and the calls from Tahrir square for a democratic reform

of the state. Unlike Spain, however, in Greece the movement was born on the eve of an anticipated conflict—over a new package of austerity measures—within an ongoing major social crisis epitomised by the ‘Memorandum of Understanding’, so it acquired a concrete ‘target’: that the Medium Term Economic Program not be put to vote (‘we do not owe—we shall not sell—we shall not pay’ was a very popular slogan on posters), although the general feeling was not that of negotiating with the government, but that ‘they must all leave now’, in a rejection not only of PASOK but of the whole political establishment. This is why there was a strong appeal of the images from Tunisia, Egypt, or Argentina and the humiliating departure of prime ministers. Similar to North Africa and Spain, Facebook and other ‘social media’ networks, as well as mobile phones, had a very significant role in the coming together of the crowd, especially for younger protesters, while from the outset the publicity for the events in the mainstream media became itself a ‘call to arms’ (the media suppressed their ‘enthusiasm’ only after the first general strike, on June 15).

Real democracy and the rise of a new bureaucracy

Echoing the Spanish ‘indignados’, the movement in Greece called for ‘real democracy now’, and various militants/ideologues who found themselves within the crowd would each fantasise/proclaim their own version of democracy. The call for ‘real democracy now’, both in Spain and in Greece, is the manifestation of the crisis of politics/representation, which itself is the result of the negotiation of the price of labour power having become a-systemic, and even more so in the setting of the current capitalist crisis. However, both these movements articulated a democratic critique of democracy, that is, a political critique of politics; they were born in an impasse.

From the beginning, it was about ‘taking our lives into our own hands’ since the ones who are supposed to make decisions for us do not represent us anymore, while the question of ‘what are we to do with our lives’ was repressed. The banning of party-political identities was intended to

create a public space where everyone could join in, speak and decide together. And indeed various open assemblies, which formally are such spaces, were created, initially in the central squares and after a point in various neighbourhoods of Athens. The latter were in part the revitalisation of the local assemblies which had sprung up during the December 2008 riots, and in part a rather unsuccessful attempt to impose a central direction on local assemblies which were already active, as in the case of the Athenian district of Vyronas. But the political ‘overcoming’ of politics can only create a new bureaucracy.

The new bureaucracy of the assemblies—which hosted leftist MPs or ex-MPs, militants, high ranking unionists, local council members, left-nationalist journalists, ‘sensitive’ artists, and so on, who had just left their party/political banners and logos behind—was actually a coalition of the parliamentary left (SYRIZA, but not the CP, which was not involved in the events) with extra-parliamentary leftist parties/groups (after a point, bitter, but still a coalition). The presence of many younger protesters—students, or ex-students and workers/unemployed (in Greece, passing through university does not mean that one is destined to join the middle strata, even less so over the last decade)—in the ‘lower part’ of Syntagma square and the assemblies in the various districts of Athens and outside the capital facilitated the domination of the assemblies by the leftists, since the latter traditionally have strong links with universities. Within the first week, this bureaucracy was already prevalent and propagated the existence and expansion of the assemblies—proclaiming them a ‘workshop in democracy’—as an end in itself. From this point on it represented and tried to maintain the framework within which the internal dynamics and conflicts of the movement developed. For the bureaucracy, everything could be discussed as long as it did not radically question the line of those who controlled the assemblies, because this would call into question the assemblies themselves, and therefore democracy. And who wants to be against democracy?

The ‘real democratic’ discourse was the almost total absence of practical actions in the ‘indignados’ movement. Leaving aside the three days of general strike and the spontaneous attacks against politicians here and

there that had been taking place for a while in Greece—manifesting a diffuse, accumulated rage on the part of the working class and proletarianised petit-bourgeois and middle strata—there were no important actions organised by the assemblies, neither the central nor the local ones, or even more informal groupings of protesters (with the exception of some interventions in unemployment offices organised by the Group of Workers and Unemployed). Even the sabotaging of ticket machines twice in Syntagma underground station was organised by the so-called ‘I don’t pay’ movement which pre-existed the gatherings in the squares. The bureaucracy of the assemblies, for its part, did its best to block any such actions. The various ‘thematic groups’ which were created during the first days of the movement, to the extent that they did not wind up merely as practical executors of the assembly’s decisions (photocopying and handing-out leaflets etc) vanished in non-practice. It is true that swearing at politicians and cops outside Parliament, spending time with so many other people, eating, drinking, dancing, chatting, and sleeping together is a nice feeling, and a break with the normality of everyday life. However, this movement lacked the practical actions and the imagination that the December 2008 riots or even the 2006–7 student movement produced.

A major emphasis of the democratism of the movement and its bureaucracy was the condemnation of proletarian violence, and in this sense it once again echoed the Spanish movement. This democratism identifies violence with an increasingly authoritarian state, against which it counterposes a ‘true democracy’ that will be able to resolve conflicts in a peaceful, civilised manner. It sees proletarians as treated unfairly, not as exploited. It sees citizens instead of classes. Contradictorily, these same citizens attack politicians whenever they happen to encounter them. However, as will become evident below, there was a shift in this internal dynamic of the movement after the confrontations with the police on June 15, a shift that led to the major clashes on June 28 and 29. This shift affirmed the class character of the present conflict and the proletarian component of the movement, and this was most clearly manifested at the moment of its virtual death.

No flags but the Greek flag

The banning of all political flags and banners from gatherings in the squares left only one banner unchallenged: the Greek national flag, the banner of a class compromise. Democracy is always a national democracy, in the last instance.

Greek flags were mostly seen in the 'upper part' of Syntagma square, where (far) rightist groupings were also present. But it was precisely their presence that testified to the nationalism which permeated the nature of the 'indignados' movement. Nationalism was the ground on which the left and the right wings (territorialised in the 'lower' and 'upper' parts of Syntagma square) rubbed shoulders. (Far) right nationalism proper found its other half in the Stalinist, anti-imperialist nationalism of the Left and far Left. As a leftist academic (Panagiotis Sotiris) put it:

Even the mass use of Greek flags in the rallies, a practice that some segments of the Left misread as 'nationalism', is an expression of the need for popular sovereignty, social cohesion and collective social dignity.

Even protesters coming from the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu could not but tolerate this diffuse nationalism, at least before June 15:

In my opinion they are not nazis in the classic sense, they are just old-fashioned far-rightists with a nerve that does not correspond to their small number. As such, any targeting against them, which one speaker suggested, was rightly considered pointless. It would be tragic if our side began a tactic of bullying and exclusion. These people were simply unable to shape events, they are simply non-existent, and they will either be unavoidably incorporated into the body of the real procedures of the movement (assemblies, etc.) or they will leave on their own.

In the first days of the events, there were some attacks against immigrants and some incidents of bullying by fascists/(far) rightists. However,

there were anti-nationalist, anti-racist tendencies as well, multiplied after June 15, which prevented further such incidents and welcomed the few immigrants that found themselves in the events. This contradictory co-existence gave way to physically violent confrontations in late June, especially during the two-day general strike.

An effort to interpret the nationalisation of the movement in Greece must take into account: a) the social structure (overgrown petit-bourgeoisie) and the history of class struggle in Greece (national liberation movement during the German occupation in WWII, civil war, recent seven-year dictatorship, identified by the Left as American-imposed), which has given birth to and maintained very significant anti-imperialist reflexes in Greek society; b) the fact that the austerity measures are perceived as imposed by foreign powers/interests, in a view that mistakes the rule of largely financial, and by nature international, capital for a rule of foreign, more powerful nations and their interests on 'our' sovereign nation and its people. This gives rise to fantasies that the Greek state's break with the eurozone can permit a self-sustained development which will comply with the interests and needs of Greek people; c) the position of the Greek state in the global hierarchy of capitalist national formations (we saw the presence of national flags both in Egypt and Greece—although in Greece they were not as prevalent as in Egypt—but not in Spain), which is related to the above; d) the migration crisis in Greece which occurs in a context where an already over-abundant surplus population is increasing further, which is just one part of a European and ultimately global migration crisis:

At the same time, there is an uncontrollable migration crisis. Tens of thousands of Afghans, Iraqis, Pakistanis, Bengalis, Somalis and North Africans are packed into crumbling buildings owned by slumlords, mostly Greek, who double as traffickers. Around Omonia Square, migrants search in rubbish for bottles, cables, clothing, anything to sell. The charity Médecins du Monde has declared a humanitarian emergency; in the lobby of its small clinic young men wait for hours [...]. Like the debt,

the migration crisis has a European dimension. Greece is a main entry point for people trying to reach the EU from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa; 150,000 entered the country without papers in 2010 alone. Most of them cross the Turkish border, where the government plans to build a seven-mile wall; hundreds are detained there in conditions unfit for animals. Few want to stay in Greece, but under pressure from the EU the government has tightened controls over the exit points, turning the country into a giant lobster trap to keep migrants from reaching London, Paris or Berlin. According to the 2008 Dublin II Regulation, refugees have to apply for asylum in the first EU country they reach; Greece has 54,000 pending asylum applications and an approval rate of 0.3 percent.⁴

It must be stressed that this migration crisis is territorialised in the city centre of Athens, where whole neighbourhoods have been transformed into ghettos/no-go areas, dominated by unemployment, petty crime, drugs and prostitution. This in turn has led to a proliferation of far-right/fascist groups in the area, many of which organise daily attacks against immigrants, in many cases together with the police, and they echo the concerns of the Greek petit-bourgeoisie of central Athens who see themselves vanishing in the ongoing recession and the depreciation of their neighbourhoods due to a growing lumpen population and associated crime.

With mass irregular migration and immiseration comes crime, both petty and organised, run by Greeks as well as foreigners. Athens was once seen as Europe's safest capital; last year there were 145 armed robberies in a single week. The city has become a mecca for illegal weapons: you can get a 'used' Beretta for around 800 euros or a .357 Magnum for a mere 500. Racist violence is on the rise, as are revenge killings and turf wars. Five dismembered brown-skinned bodies have been found since Christmas at one municipal dump. Even at midday, formerly prosperous

⁴ Maria Margaritis, 'Greece in debt, eurozone in crisis', *The Nation*, 28 June 2011.

streets are lined with women in hot pants and high heels, most of them African; their pimps stay in the shadows. Heroin is cheaper here than anywhere else in Europe. As the authorities abdicate from policing parts of the city, the task of 'keeping order' is assumed by vigilantes affiliated with the neofascist party Chrysi Avgi, or Golden Dawn, which last year won its first seat on the City Council. Chrysi Avgi patrols large areas of Athens, with the explicit or tacit support of many Greek residents and often of the police, staging pogroms against migrants and pitched battles with bands of anarchists who oppose them; on May 19 more than 200 people rampaged through the center, smashing shop windows and kicking or beating every dark-skinned man they saw while the police stood by. A young sympathiser described the group's activities to me, proudly lifting his shirt to show a scar on his back inflicted, he said, by an Afghan with a knife. 'We go into the basements where they have illegal mosques to check their papers, clear them out. They could be Al Qaeda; they could be anything. It's not chance that they're Muslims; they're coming on purpose to undermine the country. There's a plan, a secret funding mechanism, and there's no state to protect us. The police are on the side of the migrants. We had to liberate Attica Square with our fists. The migrants were washing their clothes, their children, in the fountain; they were sleeping and praying in the square. It offends me to see them praying in the square.' This spring a 21-year-old Bengali was stabbed to death in 'revenge' for the murder of a Greek expectant father knifed on the street for his camera. Two Afghans have been charged with the killing of the Greek; no one has been arrested for the Bengali's murder.⁵

The general strikes

The three days of general strike placed the 'indignados' movement on the level of a central conflict between the working class and the state, and put its role as an inconvenient but tolerable citizen protest into question. On the one hand, the square occupations (especially Syntagma) territorialised this conflict, provided it with an actual space to defend, but on

⁵ Maria Margaronis, 'Greece in debt, eurozone in crisis'.

the other hand this prohibited the diffusion of the clashes throughout central Athens.

On June 15, the demonstration in Athens was huge (probably more than 200,000 people). There was a presence of the more petit-bourgeois 'upper part' of Syntagma square and with it of right-wing nationalist tendencies. The clashes with the police lasted for some hours and they were supported by a high proportion of the protesters, a part of whom were practically involved. The number of demonstrators was so big that the police had some difficulties controlling the situation, although very few people were properly armed to fight. Many participants described an impressive feeling of solidarity and determination among the demonstrators. The dominant slogans until then, like 'thieves' or 'all politicians to go', gave way to more anti-police and anti-state ones. June 15 was the first time a break with the pacifist, non-violent discourse of the 'indignados' movement emerged. The heavy repression by the state disillusioned many 'indignados'; from then on, the pacifist calls by the leftist bureaucracy started to sound more and more grotesque, although the discourse about 'hooded agent provocateurs' by the Left and the media lasted to the end. In addition, the proposal by PASOK for a coalition government which would encompass all the big parliamentary parties, and the reformation of the board of ministers made clear that they lacked the luxury to negotiate any of the new austerity measures.

On June 28, the first day of the 48 hour general strike and the day that the voting process for the Medium Term Economic Program started in the Parliament, the demonstrators were far fewer (20–30,000) and displayed a much narrower social composition, with mainly the most militant proletarian parts participating. Already in the preceding days, the gatherings in Syntagma square were much smaller and less lively than before and everybody felt the 48 hour general strike would be the most violent final act of the movement. It is indicative of the shift in the dynamics of the movement that the clashes on June 28 started after a 1,000 strong bloc attacked a group of 20–30 fascists who were beaten heavily and only saved by the police. On June 29, the demonstrators were 40–50,000. Initially, there were some unsuccessful attempts by protesters to

block the entrance of MPs to the Parliament. Later, after the blocs of the demonstrators were attacked by the police, various small groups of them found themselves involved in clashes in different parts of the area around the Parliament and the University of Athens. In both days, a lot of people took part in clashes, not just anarchists, and even more were willing to support them with their presence. The tactics of the police this time were evidently to clear the square and put an end to the occupation, which resulted in large quantities of teargas and protesters sent to hospital.

An interesting thing to note is that in all three days of general strike there were few attacks against property; the target was mainly the police. There were some incidents where protesters trying to attack luxury hotels and banks were booed. Also interesting is the fact that there were very few Molotov cocktails used, since many in the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu did not want a repetition of what had happened on 5 May 2010, when three people died after a bank was set alight during a big demonstration in central Athens. Apart from the three days of general strike, there were seven-day intermittent strikes in the state power company and the port of Piraeus, none of which was connected to the 'indignados' movement, however. The field of production seemed very distant.

The day after June 29 many small demonstrations and some occupations against the heavy repression took place in various cities, while Syntagma square had already been re-occupied the previous night. However, there was a dominant feeling of defeat and disappointment as the 'Memorandum' was voted, and it seemed little could be done about it. But at the same time there was a lot of anger against the police and politicians, diffused through much of Greek society.

The contradictory dynamics of the movement

Above were described the prevalent trends of the movement, the essential characteristics of its nature, which provided the context within which all its *internal* contradictions developed over time. One must maintain an understanding of the *temporal* character of the dynamics of the movement and its contradictions. It is important to stress again that the first

general strike on June 15 was a turning point that accelerated the unfolding of the contradictions, intensifying them, while the number of protesters in the squares was decreasing.

Even from the beginning, the gap between the 'upper' and 'lower' parts of Syntagma square was evident. As said above, the 'upper part' was composed to a significant extent by a petit-bourgeois element that sees itself in danger of vanishing (which means thrown into the proletarian class) by aggressive tax hikes, rising inflation, and policies like the opening up of protected professions within the context of an ongoing recession which squeezes the market and business opportunities. In the 'lower part' there was a significant presence of students, workers and unemployed who actually face budget cuts and the privatisation/commercialisation of public assets as a further squeeze on their income (direct or indirect) and a scrapping of job opportunities in the public sector. Practically, these 'lower part' protesters were involved in the assemblies, while most of the 'upper part' ones would leave around 9pm, when the assembly was about to start.

The conflictual class interests among the protesters were smoothed by the fact that the 'Memorandum' means a direct deterioration in living conditions for everyone. Hence, for a while, all coexisted under the umbrella of democratism/nationalism. At the level of political identities, this umbrella produced the weird picture of anarchists and far-rightists jointly throwing stones at the police on June 15.

However, the incursion of proletarian violence on June 15, and the subsequent police repression, brought the class character of the conflict to the forefront. This led to a gradual shrinking in the size of the movement and of its petit-bourgeois elements. The prevailing mood towards violence gradually changed, and this was manifested in the multiplication of voices raised against the pacifist calls of the leftist bureaucracy after June 15, and in the extended clashes during the 48 hour general strike. Within the 'lower part' in Syntagma, groupings such as the Group of Workers and Unemployed and other tendencies would now increasingly challenge the domination of the new bureaucrats. The tolerance of (far) rightists and fascists gave way to verbal and physical attacks, a 200

strong demo on June 27 shouting antifascist slogans, and the beating up of fascist groups in the June 28 demonstration. After June 29, the general feeling was that everyone had to take sides: 'with us or with the police?' Even the union confederation representing public sector workers called for a demo 'against the repression of the workers' movement' on June 30.

What was it all about?

The 'indignados' movement in Greece was a massive, populous, inter-class movement, and—although the temporal unfolding of its internal contradictory dynamics must not be forgotten—this defined its very nature, unlike the December 2008 riots which were a minoritarian movement incorporating high school kids, young precarious workers and immigrants—namely, those who have no future *par excellence*—in the frontline. The large numbers of protesters reflect a deep social crisis that affects wide strata of the population, proletarian and otherwise. The massive, inter-class character of the movement resulted in the contradictory and conflictual diversity of the crowd.

The democratic discourse of the movement was an inter-class response to a major political crisis, against a state which is becoming authoritarian. This democratic discourse is very much associated with the penetration of the middle strata (mostly the young generation, the would-be middle strata) and the petit-bourgeois into the class struggle, but it can only be transitory because of the severity of the crisis. This was also the case, shaped obviously by different particularities, both in Spain and the Arab world. This democratic discourse *is not*, however, the radical democratism of the '90s and early 2000s, the radical democratism of the anti-globalisation movement. The difference is that no visions of an alternative society, of a capitalism with a human face, exist anymore. This makes of this democratic discourse *a mere form* which is missing the content of an alternative way of living and reproducing oneself. This is manifested in the absence of any questioning of the established social roles, in the absence of wage demands, in the all too easy abstract condemnation of

financial capital, in the fact that the 'lifestyle of the squares' cannot be appealing outside them. Radical democratism is well and truly dead.

The 'indignados' movement was the struggle of proletarians and rapidly proletarianised middle and petit-bourgeois strata whose reproduction is blocked, who are becoming poor, a struggle waged at the level of politics—that is—outside production. Faced with the generalisation of the absence of future in the progress of the current crisis and the intensification of the dynamics of the restructuring, protesters cannot practically imagine any way out, any concrete way in which their lives could be different, so they put forward a mere form, real democracy, which however much it can represent all their aspirations for a better life, remains an empty form. In this respect, this movement might appear as the flip side of the coin of the December 2008 riots.

The voting of a new bailout and new austerity measures provided the movement with a specific target, a demand, something to struggle for. This target was concretised in the relation between the 'indignados' and the general strikes, with the latter placing the movement at the level of a *social* conflict between the working class and the state. This caused a shift in the internal dynamics of the movement and at the same time posed an end date for it, defining what the protesters could expect as a victory or a defeat. Finally, the movement was defeated. And although some gatherings and small scale actions continue, with mostly the militants involved now, it seems that everyone is waiting for the summer holidays to confirm its end.

What was made evident by the conflict over the new austerity measures is that the bourgeoisie has no space for manoeuvres and no will for negotiations. As the deputy Prime Minister Theodore Pangalos put it on June 27, 'without [the austerity package] the country will be broke by mid-July and if that happens, we are likely to see tanks on the streets of Athens to protect the banks'. What is left for the management of the population is the police, as was clearly demonstrated on June 29, or even the army. What was also made evident by the 'indignados' movement is that the turn of the republic towards an authoritarian formalisation of the repressive management of the population will tend to have a 'national

socialist' *tone*. However, it is highly doubtful that we will see a 'national socialist' Greek state capitalism, as the present mode of accumulation in its crisis provides no basis for it, since the nationalist material integration of a part of the working class is out of the question, while at the same time there is no such thing as an autonomous Greek capital anymore. Any forecasts are very risky at the moment. We suppose everything will be determined by the development of the global crisis (predicted currency crises) and the coming unfolding of the class struggle. The next target of the government is a new higher education act which aims to radically 'modernise' the university system in the country, while a discussion on the inadequacy of the recently voted austerity package and the practical possibility of default or the restructuring of the debt is already taking place in the daily press.

Rocamadur, July 2011