

The political situation in Greece: Savage neoliberalism, militarism, and institutional racism

Via [Contrahegemonía](#)

The current political situation in Greece is full of contradictions. It is a political “moment” where everyone—both the ones above and the ones from below—understands that the status quo is not sustainable, and they must prepare for drastic changes.

I feel obliged to begin by mentioning an important working-class victory, which came at a time when it was more needed than ever. It is about a workplace that is characterized by extreme “flexibilization” of labor, a company named E-Food, which started as an electronic “platform” for selling and delivering mostly food, but also other products.

E-Food grew enormously during the pandemic and the lockdowns, employing 3,000 workers (with “flexible” contracts or temporary 3-month contracts) and making important profits. The company realized that the new, anti-worker, labor law (for its provisions, see previous article in [Alencontre.org](#)) provides a rare opportunity to deregulate labor even further, in order to maximize its profits. It announced to the delivery workers that they must accept becoming freelancers, as “partners” of the company. That meant losing whatever minimal protection of their working rights that was left to them and engaging in a vicious competition among each other in order to obtain a lousy “piecework” pay.

A sensational strike followed, which won a major victory, based on two factors:

One, the best traditions of the workers united front. The strike was supported by the close co-ordination of the Union of Workers in Food and Tourism (an established sectoral union with a long history, where the Communist Party is the dominant force) with the "Rank-And-File Assembly of Two-Wheeler Rider Workers" (SVEOD by its Greek initials), one of the "new" forms of "syndicalist" union organizing, which has strong roots among delivery workers and a serious involvement of anarchist/autonomist forces.

Second, the manifestation of a powerful wave of solidarity among broad parts of the population, which during the lockdowns had recognized the delivery workers as "essential workers." Public usage of E-Food services collapsed immediately, while the government realized that it couldn't afford to attack the workers who went on strike and organized massive motorbike-protests. E-Food was forced to an unorderly retreat, announcing that the 2.016 delivery workers employed by the company are now hired with open-ended (permanent) contracts, which is the most "regulated" level of labor relations left standing in Greece. This victory was wildly celebrated, and it sends a "message" to all the working class.

Of course, the battle in E-Food was not an isolated incident. In public hospitals (against cuts in social spending) and in public schools (against a new program of "evaluation" for teachers), a full "calendar" of strike-actions is under way. Next to this resilient core of strike action, we hope that the activity of new parts of the working class will emerge, and that is why we consider the victorious example of E-Food especially important and with potential consequences in the mid-long term.

The mood among the working-class is not counted exclusively by the thermometer of strike actions. This summer, the experiences of the pandemic combined with the experiences of the disastrous wildfires to generate a climate of popular indignation and anger against the government of Mitsotakis.

The political “wear and tear” of the government and Mitsotakis himself could be seen in public opinion polls where a withdrawal of confidence to the ruling party was displayed.

It was this issue that Mitsotakis tried to address with his “programmatic” speech in the Thessaloniki International Fair, which traditionally serves as an annual epicenter of political debate and interest. Prior to the Fair, the Press heralded the announcement of a distributive program. This program was proven limited and mostly oriented towards capitalists (a tax-cut in profits) and... the rich (canceling any taxation to the transfers of assets and large properties). The political message of Mitsotakis was clear: “We are not shifting in our policy!”. While, even on the face of major threats (pandemic) and major disasters (wildfires), “the government’s priority remains promoting its program and completing its project of reforms.”

This direction was highlighted with two emblematic moves, that happened rapidly in the next weeks:

The government completed the privatization of the Port of Piraeus, with the Chinese giant shipping company Cosco now obtaining 5 percent of the shares. The dockworkers in Piraeus, who had already amassed a bitter experience of what it means to work for Cosco (refusal of any collective contract, a ban on unionism, extreme intensification of workload), are now completely unprotected inside a “Free Zone” (like Special Economic Zones) established in the biggest port of the country. Meanwhile, Cosco is free to promote its project of expansion (connecting the port with railways, building a logistics center, its own hotels, conference halls, etc.).

Then, in an absolutely surprise move, the government announced the sudden privatization of the Public Power Corporation (public electricity company), selling 51 percent of its shares. Maintaining the majority share (meaning the right to management) of the Public Power Corporation was until recently

a “red line” even among bourgeois political forces, which considered the production of electric power as a sector of “strategic importance” for Greek capitalism and its state.

What had already happened was the fragmentation of the company and the privatization of the distribution network management, by selling it to Macquarie Group, a notorious Australian fund which has been described as a “vampire”, as it tends to buy public utility companies, suck them dry and then abandon them leaving ruins behind.

But this time around Mitsotakis is privatizing the production of electric power, meaning factories, hydropower projects, mines, and some dozens of thousands of workers! As the neoliberals triumphantly declare in the Press, this is the biggest privatization in the history of the country.

These moves leave no space for illusions about the direction of the economic and social policy of the government. In contrast with some reflections and questionings that emerge in the mainstream discourse in the US and parts of Europe, the Greek government remains fully committed to the neoliberal agenda and strategy. But in order to fully understand the nature of this government, we must also take into account its moves in two other fields.

Militarism

In Thessaloniki, Mitsotakis announced he expands the initial purchase of 18 expensive French Rafale warplanes to 24. This grand purchase was announced in a country which, a few weeks before, was in desperate need of firefighting aircraft but lacked them...

And now Mitsotakis announces a colossal program of naval armaments: The purchase of 3 + 1 French Belharra frigates and 3 French Gowind corvettes. These French warships are considered “heavy gear” (especially the Belharra frigates are characterized as “Blue Water Navy”, meaning a maritime force

than can operate across the deep waters of open oceans). They have a long range, a big destructive firepower, and they can provide electronic support to the destructive force of other weaponry. The warmongering websites that “specialize” in militarism, argue that the Greek Navy is upgraded from a defensive force in the Aegean Sea to a force “strategically present” in the wider Eastern Mediterranean.

The overall amount of public investment to new warplanes and warships is now over 10 billion euros, a colossal number for the size of the Greek economy. It is a provocation for a country whose public schools and hospitals are under collapse.

The decision to buy the Belharra frigates has a background. The government had leaked to the Press that it intends to purchase the smaller and cheaper American MSCC frigates. But, as described by a journalist who specializes in questions of “national interest”, the admirals revolted, demanding the more modern, more “aggressive” French warships. And the government rushed to comply with pleasure.

Because Mitsotakis, in addition to the Rafale warplanes and the Belharra frigates, has also “purchased” from Macron the Mutual Defense Agreement between Greece and France. This Agreement declares (especially against Turkey) that any war action against one of the two countries will automatically activate the military engagement of the other. With this Agreement, French imperialism is making its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean official. There, it will find an already established network of alliances among Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel, where French imperialism will play an upgraded, if not leading, role.

Those who—especially after AUKUS—consider European/American relations as solely (or mostly) competitive, should examine the example of Greece’s positioning in Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans.

While the French-Greek Agreement was announced, negotiations on the Mutual Defensive Agreement between Greece and USA were finalized. This Agreement stipulates an upgrade of American military bases in Suda (in the island of Crete), Alexandroupoli (next to the Greco-Turkish border...), Larisa and Stefanoviki in Magnisia (central Greece). In exchange, the Greek State will receive American weaponry: Upgrading the F-16 warplanes to Viper, incorporation of Greece to the production of F-35, purchase of missiles and precision projectiles for the Ground Forces.

The constant argument of the neoliberals against any workers' demand, the claim that "there are no funds available" to satisfy it, is proven to be an utter lie when it comes to armaments and the Greco-Turkish competition for regional dominance.

Institutional racism

In contemporary Greece, in the 21st century Europe, the refugee question is addressed with extreme atrocities that can be described as state crimes.

Dozens of refugees who succeed—after many efforts and torments—to reach the Greek shores, are found by the Coast Guards and then they... disappear. When antiracist organizations insist to learn about their whereabouts, official state authorities reply shamelessly: "Don't know – No comment". It is a common secret that these people are "repatriated", meaning they are unloaded to the Turkish shores in the most illegal, inhumane, and dangerous way. It is a monstrous escalation of the push-back tactic, which had been used by the Coast Guard, forcefully stopping the boats that carried refugees from entering Greek territorial waters.

Mitsotakis didn't hesitate to give to this policy an ideological dimension and take full responsibility for it. In his speech in Thessaloniki, he emphasized that his

government's goal is to secure "zero arrivals" and that this a job that can be done "by the police and the coast guard". This policy is two-fold: On the one hand, the police are making sure that life for any refugees who reach the country will become unbearable, in order to send the message—as Mitsotakis said— "Don't come here!" On the other hand, the Coast Guard uses illegal "pirate" tactics to make sure that only a few will succeed in crossing the border.

Those who believe that neoliberals are still some sort of liberals when it comes to civil rights should think twice. The government of Mitsotakis is a clear example of neoliberal pro-capitalist policies going hand-in-hand with ruthless nationalism and militarism, and institutional-state racism.

Thus, it is no coincidence that despite the great antifascist victory that led Golden Dawn to prison, the governmental policy is creating the fertile ground for the reactivation of fascist groups. The recent dangerous attacks by fascists in schools of the poorer districts in Thessaloniki display this threat.

To sum things up, we are facing the most dangerous government we have faced in Greece ever since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974. This government has suffered injuries and its political capital has declined, through the bitter experiences of its rule until now.

The government of Mitsotakis is heading towards some serious tests, as in 2023 Greek capitalism will have to address yet again its debt crisis and find a new working balance in the midst of the renegotiations on the EU Stability Pact.

But these don't mean that this government is about to collapse (at least not now). It still enjoys the support of the ruling class. And Mitsotakis will seek to utilize this support in order to impose his rule through an aggressive policy.

So, the politics and tactics of the parties in opposition are

an important factor. In Thessaloniki, Tsipras made a speech to address what Mitsotakis had said a week earlier. He spoke for hours and succeeded to not mention the word "Left" even once! He talked about a "new beginning", with the "middle class" playing a central role, through the formation of a "broad-progressive government". Even the past symbols and colors of SYRIZA were absent from the room where he gave the speech and a press conference. The color green prevailed (which in Greece is identified with social-democratic PASOK), while Tsipras reproduced the most typical slogans (and even catchphrases..) of... Andreas Papandreou, the historical founder and leader of PASOK.

It doesn't take a lot of political experience to understand that this "center-left" strategy is not an efficient response to the aggression and the pure pro-capitalist direction of Mitsotakis. This can be seen in the opinion polls, where New Democracy is losing ground, but SYRIZA remains stagnant.

The vacuum in left-wing politics is obvious. This puts some pressure on the Communist Party, which is "called upon" by the existing reality to display some initiative. Though it is not yet known whether it will do so, or most importantly what kind of initiatives it would take. The situation is also putting pressure to the forces of the radical-anticapitalist Left to address the situation of their fragmentation in the aftermath of the defeat of 2015.

The hopeful element in this picture is the tendency towards a revitalization of struggles from below. For us, the workers' victory in E-Food and the message it sent to the rest of the working class are especially important.