

Greek Military Prepares for Mass Repression

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Former high-level Greek diplomat Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos told the UK's *New Statesman* last week that discussions had taken place between senior Greek politicians and the armed forces on the military's response to what Chrysanthopoulos described as an "explosion of social unrest" expected to occur "quite soon."

Chrysanthopoulos said that in the coming months, "There will be further increases in armed actions. There will be bloody demonstrations."

Without giving details, he said, "There are contacts by certain politicians with elements in the armed forces to guarantee that in the event of major social unrest, the army will not intervene."

This last claim was likely made for public consumption. Even if such a request had been made, any assurances from the Greek military would be worthless given the recent history of the country, in which the "regime of the colonels" seized power in a military coup in 1967 that lasted until 1974. Since the onset of mass austerity in Greece in 2010 there have been constant rumours of coup discussions among high-ranking military personnel.

The most significant aspect of Chrysanthopoulos' interview is the revelation of discussions between politicians and the military on how to respond to the threat of social revolution.

Greek ruling circles are working on the assumption that insurrectionary struggles are inevitable because of the intolerable level of suffering they have imposed on the working class. Within less than four years, the social position of the Greek working class has been reduced to levels not seen since the Nazi occupation during World War II.

Brutal poverty is a fact of life for millions. One major aspect of the assault on living conditions is the removal of public health provisions.

More than 50 pharmaceutical conglomerates have either halted or savagely cut supplies to Greece—citing concerns for their profits. The dangerous shortage of hundreds of basic medicines is resulting in chaotic scenes of patients rushing from one pharmacy to another in search of vital drugs, while public hospitals lack adequate supplies of drugs to dispense.

Such conduct is not confined to the big pharmaceutical companies. On Tuesday it emerged that the Swiss Red Cross, a non-profit relief agency, is set to slash the number of blood donor packets it supplies to Greece. It cited concerns that it has not received full payment for previous allocations and announced that beginning in 2015 the number of blood donor packets it sends to Greece will be halved from the current annual level of 28,000.

As a result of the austerity policies demanded by the “troika” (the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Union), a staggering 4.65 million people are now either unemployed or economically inactive. There are 450,000 households in which no one is employed. Of the 2.6 million people employed in the private sector in 2010, 900,000 have been laid off. Because the duration of benefits has been slashed, just 225,000 of the unemployed now receive unemployment pay.

In the private sector, just 600,000 workers (from a total 1.6 million) now work a regularly paid eight-hour day. Professor Savas Robolis of the University of Panteion in Athens recently said, “The remainder—a million workers—have had their hours cut or are getting paid late, four or five months late. They are in a state of desperation.”

This week’s annual report by the Bank of Greece found that 23 percent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2012, compared to 16 percent in 2011. Also noted was the exponential increase in child poverty, with the rate of families at risk reaching 31 percent in just one year (2010-2011). In the period 2010-2012, the average gross salary in the country was cut by 20.6 percent and labour costs for employers decreased by 18.5 percent.

Given the austerity measures already in place, there will be an overall reduction in labour costs in Greece for the period 2012-2014 of 17.6 percent. So savage are these measures that they are set to surpass the 15 percent reduction in overall costs demanded by the troika.

Presenting the report, the bank’s chairman, George Provopoulos, claimed that economic recovery would be achieved by means of austerity and demanded that even harsher measures be imposed. “Now that the finishing line is finally visible,” he said, “we ought to intensify efforts, to quicken our pace to cover the final stretch and ensure that citizens’ sacrifices have not been in vain...”

Speaking of the victims of these policies, he declared, “Extreme and unreasonable demands from social groups do not contribute towards this goal.”

The bank’s report was issued as representatives of the troika once again converged on Athens to monitor the implementation of the programme agreed with the New Democracy/PASOK/Democratic Left government.

Among the issues to be settled is how steeply this year’s pharmaceutical budget is to be slashed. As a result of previous troika demands, the budget was cut from €3.7 billion to €2.4 billion last year. Reports suggest it could be cut to €2 billion this year.

With pharmaceutical firms already withholding many drugs, this is a prescription for a health catastrophe and many needless deaths.

The troika is also set to demand a speedup in the layoff of 25,000 public sector workers this year (half by June) in order to meet the agreed 150,000 redundancies by 2015. If Athens were to fail to impose the cuts to the troika’s satisfaction, two tranches of loans for March and April totalling €8.8 billion would be withheld or much reduced. Failure to receive the finance would result in Greece defaulting on its entire debt.

By promising if elected to reverse the austerity programme, SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) won nearly 30 percent of the vote in last year’s election. It is put forward by a host of pseudo-left organizations as a progressive alternative to the pro-austerity governing parties

and the means for countering the growth of the fascist Golden Dawn movement.

In reality, SYRIZA is no less a creature of the ruling elite than the right-wing New Democracy party, and is no less wedded to the austerity agenda. This week, SYRIZA press spokesman Panos Skourletis stated, "We do not have a magic wand that will improve and change the situation from one day to the next... We must realize that with every day this policy is applied, things grow worse. This devastation is incalculable and, therefore, restoration of the repercussions of this policy becomes even more difficult."

The meaning of such comments—that it is impossible to reverse the austerity programme—is unmistakable. SYRIZA is readying its arguments and preparing for what it will be called on to carry out if it achieves its goal of entering a future anti-working class government.

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