

Dispatch from Exarchia

A Summer of Unrest in Athens

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2020

On July 9, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's ruling New Democracy party pushed through an opportunistic law restricting public protest.

This is part of a larger assault on Exarchia, the Athens neighborhood that is home to autonomous anarchist projects, migrant communities, and self-managed squats.

More than ten thousand people took to the streets of central Athens to demonstrate against this attack on the right to assemble.

In Exarchia, the revolutionary group, Ruvikonas, released a statement declaring, "Every organization, every formation of the struggle must go public and declare its disobedience. As an anarchist federation, we clearly state that we will not respect the new law. We will protest whenever we choose and [whenever] the conditions demand and we will face the costs of this choice."

Police have been active in Exarchia since June, waging a protracted battle to evict Dervenion 56, a large squat supporting refugees, providing food, language classes, and sanctuary.

June also saw many acts of protest in solidarity with the uprising in the U.S. sparked by the Memorial day murder of George Floyd. Demonstrators hurled petrol bombs at the U.S. embassy in downtown Athens, and unfurled banners in Exarchia supporting Black Lives Matter.

"What we see happening in the U.S. is bigger and more important than anything we have experienced so far in Greece," the Anarchist Federation wrote in a statement circulated throughout anti-authoritarian sites on the internet. "We will stand by your side as best we can while continuing our own struggle here. Internationalism, the unity of the struggles reflects the unity of interests and hopes of the social base all over the planet, regardless of color and race. We always remember the solidarity shown by the American movement in our struggles here."

In early July, police moved into Exarchia, unprovoked, firing tear gas and flash grenades and were met with resistance as people organized self-defense, setting up barricades and pushing police back with Molotovs, stones and chunks of concrete.

Evictions of squats, attacks on the right to strike, the hiring of thousands of new cops, and the use of more noxious chemical weapons ordered by Mitsotakis and Athens Mayor Kostas Bakoyannis, show that the state is fortifying itself against the anticipated unrest sure to follow on the heels of the global pandemic.

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