

Timeline

2000-7: Greek economy grows at 4.2% p.a., faster than most of Europe. Foreign capital floods into the country. Pasok in office 2000-4, ND in office 2004-9.

October 2009: Pasok wins big election victory against scandal-hit ND.

Feb 2010: Pasok government announces that the ND government had underestimated the 2009 deficit at 5% of GDP, when it was actually 12.7%. Eurostat will eventually estimate the 2009 deficit at 15.6% of GDP. Government starts cuts. First general strike on 24 February.

By April 2010: Greek government can no longer borrow on global financial markets. Greek government requests an EU/IMF "bailout".

May 2010: The first "memorandum" cuts voted through Greek parliament. General strike on 4-5 May: a bank set on fire on the edges of the protest.

November 2010, January 2011, July 2011, October 2011: further cuts packages.

May-August 2011: "Indignant citizens'" movement in city squares

September 2011: Government declares a new property tax of up to 16 euros per square metre, to be added to electricity bills, so that non-payers have their electricity cut off.

28 October 2011: Big protests at the annual official parades to celebrate Greek resistance to Italy in World War 2.

31 October 2011: Pasok prime minister George Papandreou announces a referendum on a deal for a supposed 50% haircut on Greek government debt to private creditors.

10 November 2011: New coalition government formed: coalition headed by banker Lucas Papademos and supported by both Pasok and ND.

Late months of 2011 and early 2012: movement of neighbourhood committees and unions against the new property tax, which ends with a court ruling that it is illegal to cut off electricity because of non-payment.

Feb 2012: Second memorandum agreed between Papademos government and the EU/ ECB/ IMF troika.

7 May 2012: Election for a new government to replace Papademos. ND gets 19%, Syriza 17%, Pasok 13%, Independent Greeks [right-wing anti-cuts party] 11%, KKE 8.5%, Golden Dawn 7%, DL 6%.

17 June 2012: New election called after ND fails to construct a government coalition. This time it's ND 30%, Syriza 27%, Pasok 12%, Independent Greeks 8%, Golden Dawn 7%, DL 6%, KKE 4.5%.

30 July 2012: After heavy police intervention, workers at Greek Steel suspend their strike, which has been going since 31 October 2011.

5 November 2012 – The Greek parliament adopted a new round of austerity cuts required for Greece to receive the next installment of bailout.

11 November 2012 – Greece passes the 2013 austerity budget.

28 April 2013 – The parliament approves a bill that includes cutting some 15,000 state jobs by the end of 2014, including 4,000 in 2013.

11 June 2013 – The Greek government closes down the country's Public Broadcasting Service ERT. ERT workers occupy their workplaces and continue transmitting.

21 June 2013 – Democratic Left withdraws from Greek coalition government. The government's majority in parliament becomes tiny.

17 July 2013 – The Greek parliament approves new austerity measures including a for thousands of layoffs and wage cuts for civil service workers.

17 September 2013 – anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas murdered by Golden Dawn member Giorgos Roupakias, for his political beliefs. Samaras government responds by ordering the arrest of several Golden Dawn members, including party leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos

21 December 2013 – The bill about the new tax on property and the auction of houses of people falling behind on payments is approved by a majority of 152 deputies in the 300-seat chamber.

30 March 2014 – The Greek parliament passes new legislation to comply with conditions for Greece to receive its next bailout.

10 April 2014 – Greece is able to sell its government debt (bonds) on the markets again, and issues three billion euros' worth of bonds.

25 May 2014 – European Parliamentary election: Syriza tops the poll.

8 December 2014 – The Greek government announces a snap vote to elect a new president.

29 December 2014 – The government collapses after failing to elect a new president, and so elections become due on 25 January 2015.

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Help the Greek left defy the banks!

By Theodora Polenta

Greece will have new parliamentary elections early, on 25 January. According to all recent opinion polls, the left party Syriza, which lost the June 2012 election narrowly to the conservative New Democracy (ND) party, is now well ahead of ND. On all the poll figures, Syriza and the Greek Communist Party (KKE) between them will win a parliamentary majority on 25 January.

The early elections followed the failure on 29 December of the ND-led government's third attempt to get Parliament to elect a new President.

A wave of celebration followed outside the parliament. The movements that have been in the frontline of the struggle against the cuts Memoranda imposed by the IMF-EU-European Central Bank "Troika" were once again in the vanguard.

The sacked media workers of ERT; the migrant workers of General Recycling, who earlier had gone to occupy their workplace; the cleaners at the ministry of economics and the school guards, who are both victims of "reserve employment" (partial lay-off), all made their way to Syntagma Square.

"The vote has just finished" said Tasos Anastasiadis, representative of the Coordination against Shut-Down and Reserve

Employment. “The most hated government in recent years has been overthrown. Now begins the great struggle to ensure that the overthrow of the Samaras-Venizelos government will be translated into a victory of the working class people and popular strata who have been in the vanguard of struggles for so many years!”.

“The regime of Samaras-Venizelos has finally been toppled” said ERT worker Nikos Kletsas. “Today is a day that the working class have been awaiting for a long time. It is time for Samaras and Venizelos to decorate their helicopters and prepare to leave. Despite the wholesale attack and propaganda against us, ERT has been open for all these 19 months and we are confident that soon will be back in our physical space in Radiomegaro”.

Foteini Nikitara, a sacked cleaner from the ministry of economics, said: “Today is a day of happiness for all us struggling cleaners who have been protesting for the last 17 months. The overthrow of the government is a first victory, but we should not lose sight of the fact that our final victory will come when we are given back our jobs”.

School guard Babis Theodoropoulos added: “After one and a half year of struggle, the day has come. The school guards, the cleaners, the strikers of Coca Cola, the ERT workers, the cement workers from Halkida, the millions of unemployed and redundant workers, the immigrants, the Syrians and the Pakistanis, we are all happy and united for the government's overthrow. It's time to get our jobs back. The fight has just begun”.

The outgoing government and the ruling class have already begun a campaign to terrorise voters. They focusing on the “risk of leaving the euro” and Greece descending into chaos.

They try convince people that if a Syriza government is formed all their hard work will be lost. We will be outside the European “family”. We will lose all the benefits of the euro. We will “burn together in hell.”

Let us not underestimate the fear that can be generated by this “campaign of terror”, orchestrated by the political establishment and its media acolytes, the financial oligarchy, the shipowners, the bankers, the industrialists, and all the international political and financial forces which have supported the government of Samaras and Venizelos.

ND representative Maria Spiraki asked Greek people to “imagine” what life will be like in Greece after bankruptcy and exit from the euro. But already since the onset of the crisis:

- One million people have been made redundant
- Unemployment has increased 190.5%
- 30% of small business have shut down
- GDP has shrunk 25%
- Wages have been cut 38%
- Pensions have been cut 45%
- The number of people living at or below the poverty level has rises 98%
- Depression has increased 273%
- Child deaths have increased 43%.

The left — mainly Syriza, KKE, and the far-left alliance Antarsya — should enter this battle together, despite the political and ideological differences. A united front and an electoral alliance aiming at the formation of the government of the Left with Syriza at its centre would not mean uncritical support for Syriza's leadership, or sidelining political-ideological differences and each party's organisational independence.

A common electoral front would means a joint battle against the coalition government, but each component of the Left contributing to the battle with its own positions and proposals and through its own campaign.

If a united electoral front of Syriza with the KKE and Antarsya were formed, it would be a tremendous boost of confidence for the rank and file members of all three parties, and for the working class and social movements. The dynamic and political reference of this united front would have been much broader than the additive political and social

influence of the three parties separately.

However, given sectarianism and fragmentation on the Greek Left, there is only one choice: Critical support, from a working class perspective, for the formation of a Syriza government as a first step towards the formation of a government of the Left.

The highlight of the speech by Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras to Syriza's congress at the the start of January came when he saluted the cleaners from the ministry of economics, praising their 18 months of uncompromised class struggle and promising to reinstate their jobs and vindicate their struggle.

Another highlight of his speech was a commitment to adhere to the “Thessaloniki programme” announced by Tsipras back in September 2014 as a first step to offer relief to the widespread poverty and destitution in Greek society.

Syriza is also committed to “suspend auctions of primary residences”, that is, seizures by the banks of homes of people unable to keep up payments.

Yet Syriza has seriously watered down its earlier commitments to nationalise the banks under workers' and democratic control and to refuse to comply with the Memoranda.

Syriza's central slogan is vague: “The future has started: A Greece of Decency, Justice, and Democracy”.

When activists at the Syriza congress interrupted Tsipras's speech to chant “The time has come for the Left to govern”, Tsipras responded very cautiously, saying that this is the time for the whole of Greece to celebrate, independent of their historical and political affiliations.

Syriza's programme includes the following four major axes:

- Address the humanitarian crisis
- Immediate steps to restart the economy
- A national plan for recovery and workers' rights, with emphasis on the re-instatement of collective bargaining agreements (removed under the Memoranda) and the re-instatement of the minimum wage at the pre-Memorandum level of 750 euros
- Institutional and democratic transformation of public administration.

But the united front of the ruling class and national and international Greek bond holders needs a robust generalised response. And that can be no different from the Syriza conference decision for the renationalisation of all large public enterprises and organisations that have been privatised, and with “public, democratic, workers' control”.

The founding conference of Syriza also called for the nationalisation of all banks under social and workers' control is included, putting the issue of ownership and not merely, a “public control” of the banks.

But now Syriza's leaders are trying sidestep the “issue of issues” by giving the impression that a simple “tidying up” of the Greek economy, a fight against corruption, and smooth renegotiation of terms on the debt by Syriza's panel of experts, will give time and resources to finance the program.

The current agreement with the Troika requires the Greek government to pay for the next several years the colossal amount of 10 billion euros per year in interest payments. Compliance with this condition will lead to successive annual austerity programs and is not compatible with the government of the Left prioritising the needs of the working class and popular strata.

Defiance of the national and international Greek bond holders, along with the nationalisation of the banks under workers' control, should be the “hub” for the program of the Left. Those measures, along with reduction of military expenditure and taxation of church property, would yield the initial resources to support Syriza's social program.

A big issue in the Greek economy is the (non) taxation of business profits. Theoretically today profits are taxed at 26%, with Samaras promising a gradual reduction to 15%. Practically everyone knows that the actual tax paid ends up more like 5%.

However according to Syriza's leaders, there is no intention to increase (or decrease) the taxation of capital. That is outside Syriza's conference commitments. Syriza's leaders also promise to achieve “balanced budgets”.

In his speech Tsipras stated: “We reject the logic of unrealistic primary surpluses, which is the other name of austerity. And we remain firm in pursuing primarily balanced budgets and the need to exclude from the calculation of the deficit the public investment budget”.

A government of the left will need to mobilise and revitalise or recreate forms of working class and popular power in order to enforce its program of socio-economic changes at the expense of the capitalist class.

It is an illusion to think that it is possible to avoid these critical choices and confrontations and instead rely on vaguely-sketched “wider” alliances, without ruptures and overthrows. The only real allies of the Greek left are the Left and of the resistance movements in other countries.

Within Greece, the capitalists, bankers, ship owners and other financial oligarchs and members of the political establishment recognise that a government of the Left is objectively antagonistic to their needs and interests. They will battle for the victory of Samaras. If defeated, they will work to strangle a government of the Left and overthrow it.

The aim of Syriza should not be centred on the utopian search for a compromise with the national and international ruling class but on ruptures and overthrows.

Yet, in a negative development, on 3 January the central committee of Syriza voted to construct Syriza's ballot lists on the following principles and alliances. (The Left Platform withdrew its proposal and abstained in the final vote, and one representative of the Communist Tendency voted against).

1. Syriza will approach KKE and Antarsya. Tsipras asked both parties to “realise that the battle that we have to give exceeds the existing political differences within the Left”.
2. Syriza will approach the Democratic Left (Dimar), which was previously in Samaras's coalition. Tsipras said: “even if we do not manage to form an agreement before the elections, the need for a broader coalition for social salvation and recovery of the country will remain after the election”.
3. The Greens, and broadly any “social and political forces that agree with the principles of the Syriza's agenda and complement it with their own individual priorities”.
4. “Forces and individuals from the broader social and political space of the Left and Ecology but also from movements developed in the period of the memorandum” and from all political forces and individuals that supported Tsipras's candidacy for the presidency of the European Commission.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the KKE (Communist Party) refuse to cooperate with anyone, because in their view those who do not agree with them are “traitors”. In that sense they have already predetermined the failure of the attempt to build a government of the Left. When the Syriza leaders constantly water down their policies, that in turn provides an excuse for the KKE leaders.

The Greek left must:

- Fight for a government of the Left — and not of “national salvation”
- Work to unite activists of different groups for the formation of a government of the Left, as a starting point of a pro-working-class narrative and journey
- Say no to the Syriza leaders' illusions of a way out through deft negotiations with the Troika
- Oppose calls for a National Responsibility Government or for “a government of all Greeks”.
- Revitalise Syriza's rank and file in every neighbourhood and fight the battle of the candidate lists in line with Syriza's conference programmatic agreements. No collaboration with the nationalists of Anel, no cooperation with the opportunist pro-Memorandum politicians of Dimar.

The collapse of the coalition ND-PASOK government under the pressures of the struggles of the working class and youth and the lengthy capitalist crisis justifies the persistence of the revolutionary left on an anti-capitalist road. The revolutionary left, inside and outside Syriza, played a big role in shifting the mass movement to the Left, and now must act as a force giving hope for thousands of activists that this momentum will not be halted by the compromises of the leadership of Syriza.

The need for a revolutionary left pole, politically autonomous, is confirmed every day. The revolutionary left must confront the attacks and extortion of the capitalists, the EU and IMF, which will intensify if Syriza wins the election and aim for towards the complete subjugation of a government centred on Syriza.

It must continue as the left and working-class opposition under a government of the Left, supporting the vanguard and the most class-conscious sections of the working class, demanding the escalation of struggles and leading every economic and political battle.

The revolutionary left must lead a fight to smash the fascist gangs, to legalise all immigrants and grant citizenship to their children.

As the slogan of the government of the Left comes close to being materialised, the return to softer reformism, or the search for a more “realistic solution”, is not the solution. It is an illusion that if the revolutionary left prunes down its anti-capitalism then it will gain massive influence. All it will achieve is to let down the most advanced sections of the working class and youth.

The government and the ruling class did not want these early elections, which threaten to destabilise the fragile situation of Greek capitalism. However, the government, pressed by the funding gap and the need to immediately close a new agreement with the Troika, took the risk of speeding up the elections for a new President.

Samaras hoped that a third Memorandum, with new harsh anti-working class measures, could be brought for ratification to Parliament after a triumph for the government over the Presidency.

The second Memorandum was due to expire on 31 December. The Samaras government made an agreement with the Troika for a two month extension period while the “fine details” of the next Memorandum — which certainly will not be called “Memorandum” — are agreed. Samaras had hoped to announce that Greece would leave the “bail-out”, but the extension was the best he could do, since the Troika was not prepared to accept the stories about “return to growth” and “return to the markets” with which the government had saturated the Greek public for many months.

The duo of Samaras-Venizelos government has passed through parliament a hard and unpopular budget for 2015 (so much for overcoming the crisis, returning to growth, and being ready for the markets...). This budget includes new tax increases to the amount of 1.5 billion euros, disproportionately hitting disproportionately working-class people; a further reduction in social spending by 1 billion euros; reducing public investment program by 400 million euros, etc. Just one tax was to be reduced — the tax on the profits of business!

All that austerity was to allow the government to make the debt payments. Just for 2015 the interest the government is due to pay reaches 5.7 billion euros. In 2015, overall, Greece is due to pay 22.5 billion euros.

The government hoped for support in electing a new president from the now numerous “independent” careerist MPs, mostly people who have seceded from ND, Pasok, Anel, Dimar (and two from the fascist party Golden Dawn).

Before the final vote on 29 December final voting, scenarios were being unleashed where the 180 would be achieved via the help of the Golden Dawn MPs, who are mostly in jail. The government vehemently denied these rumours, stating that if the Golden Dawn MPs voted in favour of Stavros Dimas, who was nominated by the government for president of the republic, then the government would vote against in order to invalidate the process.

However, the government was happy to accept the two votes of the independent former Golden Dawn MPs (one of whom faces a pending court case).

The government managed to “persuade” some others by various above and below the table methods, but failed to collect the necessary number of 180.

An open political agreement with the prisoners of Golden Dawn leaders would have had a very big political cost, one the government did not dare take on. Scenarios for the formation of a “special purpose” government, which could bring

in more votes from the parliamentary groups of Anel and Dimar did not go far, due to the lack of willing bourgeois politicians to head such a government. The idea of nominating a more neutral political personality for President, such as Dimar leader Fotis Kouvelis, fell because of internal political conflicts inside Dimar and objections from ultra-right ex-fascist MPs now in ND (Voridis, Plevris, Georgiadis etc).

Five years on from when the crisis broke shortly after the October 2009 elections, four governments have fallen. The first was the Pasok government of George Papandreou, which lasted two years from its emphatic electoral victory and only one year from when it started seeking an IMF and EU debt “bail-out” in May 2010.

The second was the coalition government led by the banker Lucas Papademos, which lasted for seven months, November 2011 to May 2012. The third was the caretaker government of Panagiotis Pikrammenos between the two parliamentary elections of May and of June 2012. The fourth is the outgoing Samaras-Venizelos coalition.

Now anxiety for the future of Greek capitalism is evident in the national and international ruling class, and reflected in the dramatic drop in the stock market, the new rise of the “spread” in interest rate on Greek debt, and the escalation of hysterical statements against Syriza.

The traditional two party system, under which Pasok and ND got 85% of the vote, has collapsed. Pasok, and other political parties such as Dimar and Laos, have fragmented and lost their links with society with unprecedented speed.

A model for an approach to Syriza by the revolutionary left now is suggested by Trotsky's proposal for the tasks of Belgian Marxists in relation to the reformist programme of Belgian social-democracy in the mid-30s.

“First, to explain to the advanced workers the political meaning of the 'plan', that is, decipher the manoeuvres of the social-democracy at all stages; secondly, to show in practice to possibly wider circles of workers that insofar as the bourgeoisie tries to put obstacles to the realisation of the plan we fight hand in hand with the workers to help them make this experiment.

“We share the difficulties of the struggle but not the illusions. Our criticism of the illusions must, however, not increase the passivity of the workers and give it a pseudo-theoretic justification but on the contrary push the workers forward. Under these conditions, the inevitable disappointment with the 'Labor Plan' will not spell the deepening of passivity but, on the contrary, the going over of the workers to the revolutionary road...

“If we had to present a plan to the Belgian proletariat, this plan would have had an altogether different aspect. Unfortunately, the Belgian proletariat gave this mandate not to us but to the Belgian Labor Party [POB], and the plan reflects two facts: the pressure of the proletariat on the POB and the conservative character of this party...

“When we say to the masses that to realise this imperfect plan it is necessary to struggle to the end, we are far from covering up the deception; on the contrary, we are helping the masses to expose it by their own experience...

“The leaders of the POB do not want a struggle. But they are caught in the wheels of the crisis of capitalism and of reformism. They were forced to proclaim the plan and even to make of it the platform of the Belgian proletariat. It is a fact. What is our task? To help the workers to turn the wheels into which the opportunist leaders have been forced to thrust their hands.”

The Greek left takes stock: July 2013

In Greece from 17 to 29 July, Tom Harris and I from Workers' Liberty talked with several groups of the Greek left to find out about their assessments of the political situation and their activities.

We have reported elsewhere on our discussions with OKDE, whose summer camp in western Greece we attended from 20 to 28 July. Here I'll summarise our discussions with other groups.

First we met Dimitris Souftas from NAR. NAR, the New Left Current, originated in 1989 with a left-wing split from the diehard-Stalinist KKE (Communist Party of Greece) by members of its youth organisation. It is the largest group of the Greek revolutionary left, and the largest element in the Antarsya coalition. Politically, it aims for the "refounding" of a communist movement in which "all the communist sub-ideologies will have something to offer". The newspaper Prin, linked with NAR, is the most widely-read paper of the Greek left, but circulates through news-stands rather than through hand-to-hand sales.

Dimitris did not agree with the assessment we'd heard from Spiros of OKDE, that on a "molecular" level opinion has shifted to the left in Greece over the last year. Since the government's shutdown of ERT (Greek equivalent of the BBC), to which the ERT workers have responded by occupying their offices, "people are back on the streets, but it is the same people back again, rather than new people turning to the left".

Since ERT, workers are more willing to take action, or for example to consider taking over factories which the bosses shut down, as the workers have done at Biome in Thessaloniki.

Society is being polarised. The government talks about the danger of civil war, but pushes policies as if it is making civil war against society. There is a close connection between what Golden Dawn says, and what the government subsequently does.

However, the government's political position is much weakened, and its ability to take further steps is weakened.

NAR's main focus over the last year has been "reconstructing the organisation", reconsidering fundamental strategic questions.

Dimitris thought Syriza had become "more and more reformist". "The left in Syriza has a big problem because people coming over to Syriza from Pasok strengthen that reformist drift, and bring in Pasok methods. We believe there will be a crisis in Syriza sooner or later, and the Syriza left will seek another home.

"We are not hostile to the Syriza left. We want to open dialogue. Antarsya should be ready, not so much to accept the Syriza left into itself, but to explore agreements on how to go further together".

The left increased its vote at the Syriza congress? "Yes, but we'll see how much that means. I think a dissident faction is always heterogeneous. The left got 30%, but what does that 30% mean?"

Wouldn't it be better for Antarsya to join with Syriza left in advance of the crisis? Couldn't joining help the left get a majority in Syriza? "We would say no. We firmly believe that if you try to influence a big party from inside you get no results. Syriza has moved to the left, when it has, because of the outside pressure of Antarsya and others.

"A Syriza government that is unwilling to radically confront the interests of capital will not only fail but open the door to Golden Dawn. We try to pull Syriza to the left by building a social and political front on the streets.

"It would be more effective if the Syriza left agreed to an anti-capitalist coalition with us. Our trouble is that most people know about politics only through the TV, and we can't reach them".

What about the KKE? "It is in a contradictory phase. Deep down, it wants to approach the rest of the left. It demonstrates together with the rest of the left more often - not all the time, but more often. There is pressure inside the KKE.

"But the militants of KKE have got longstanding habits of keeping aloof from the rest of the left. On the grassroots level KKE fights only for small economic demands, despite its revolutionary declarations".

Has there been a shift to the left in the unions? "There has been a big shift to the left in union elections, and especially in the public sector. But the majority of workers are not in unions. Often unions do not accept casual workers. Most young workers are not accepted into unions, or work in non-union sectors. The vast majority identify the unions with the bureaucrats.

"When I talked with university catering workers in dispute, I found that they couldn't even imagine that they could propose a policy for the union different from the bureaucrats'. We should create workers' clubs which are open to young workers and help them to get into unions or to create new unions". ["Unions", in Greece, are organisations covering a single workplace or a small group of workplaces, so "creating new unions" means "organising new workplaces"].

Why does NAR call for Greece to quit the euro? "Leaving the euro is not enough. If Greece leaves the euro, and is still inside the EU, then things will be no better. So Greece should also quit the EU. For that to work, we will need other countries to leave the EU too - Portugal, Spain, Italy...

"The first step is to stop the flows of capital, to nationalise the banks under workers' control, to nationalise strategic production sectors, and to create forms of organisation from below, like the Biome workers' links with neighbourhood groups to sell their products. Obviously that is not full socialist planning, but it is going in the right direction".

Antarsya, said Dimitris, has about 3000 to 4000 members, an increase of a thousand over the last year. "Antarsya has done well over the last year, but still falls short of its full potential. Three things need to be done.

"One, make Antarsya more democratic for members who are not in any of the component organisations. [Antarsya is a coalition of different organisations, but also has individual members who are in none of the component organisations].

"Two, make Antarsya a real political force in neighbourhoods and local assemblies. There is sometimes difficulty in making the national line meaningful in local terms.

"Third, defend our anti-capitalist political programme. It is ok now, but it needs to be elaborated more to connect to everyday life.

"In elections, many people who agree with our programme vote Syriza because of the left-right polarisation - they just want to be rid of the government.

"New Democracy still has support from a lot of old people, people in the countryside, and middle-class people for whom the crisis has a lagged effect. But how long will that last?"

We met Vasilis Grollios, an unaffiliated socialist whom we first came across while he was studying in England.

He told us that the government's latest decision was to abolish the jobs of school caretakers and the municipal police (who enforce regulations about parking and street-cafe furniture).

Despite thinking the government's policies absurd, he also thought the government was "not weak". "Two years ago we had maybe the biggest demonstration in the history of Greece. The police moved in - and nothing happened. Strikes take place. But life goes on".

The government's parliamentary majority is now down to three? "But it won't fall. The MPs get 7500 euros per month even without the bribes. They will hold to their positions". Besides "a large majority of the population is generally in favour of privatisations, and the municipal police are not popular".

There are many people who are scared of the left. Vasilis described people going to banks before the 2012 elections to withdraw all their money just in case the left won.

Vasilis described further government measures. The government is removing the tax-free threshold, so that all income is tax. A lot of people, he said, are not being paid for months on end, and yet they complete tax returns as if they have been paid because otherwise there will be legal action against their employer and they will lose their job.

Lots of other workers are in the black economy, or working full-time and declaring themselves as only part-time.

The police have not even dared to try to evict the ERT workers; and if the workers took over all the factories, as they

have done at Biome, then the police cannot come and evict them all. But Vasilis did not think that likely.

The Troika (EU, ECB, IMF) knows that Greece is not going to pay the debt in full. It's a dead-end policy. It will end with Greece being kicked out of the EU, or becoming a permanent debt peon.

What of the left? "The KKE and Syriza are only radical liberal. In Greece now you are considered to be on the left if you just oppose the austerity measures.

"The KKE wants capitalism with a human face. Syriza, too, is not anti-capitalist, even though it wants to appear as such. It accepts private ownership, but not the inevitable results of private ownership.

"Antarsya is more radical, closer to Marxist ideas. But they are happy to think that they are on their own, as an elite".

Vasilis quite likes OKDE, which he sees as "close to council communism". But in the last elections, he had faced a dilemma. If you vote for a party which gets less than 3%, your vote doesn't count; in fact, in effect it is redistributed among the parties which get more than 3%. He voted for Syriza so that his vote would not get stolen.

Vasilis is a part-time lecturer at a university in Thessaloniki. Have students become more politically active? "No. They are focused on their careers. New Democracy is the political force with the strongest group in universities".

From Kokkino, one of the Trotskyist groups in Syriza, we met Stathis, a student, with Amalia, a Syriza Left Platform member and Kokkino sympathiser, acting as translator.

Kokkino has recently had a split. "The comrades who decided to leave supported the Syriza leadership's demand that the 'components' in Syriza should dissolve. Maybe they had the Bloc of the Left in Portugal in mind as a model.

"We think they are exposed to a danger of incorporation. Maybe they think that Syriza is still moving to the left, but it's not like that any more.

"We fear that if Syriza comes to government, and it keeps to its current policy, there will be deadlock. It is not that Syriza wants to betray. The intentions are good, but in certain circumstances there will be great pressure on Syriza.

"If we don't insist on keeping the components, we will see the same result as Brazil" [where the Workers' Party developed as a broad radical left party, with large internal democracy, but ended up taking office and governing as neo-liberals].

There has been much discussion in Kokkino, said Stathis and Amalia, of an article by João Machado, a member of PSOL, on the experience in Brazil, where the post-Mandelite Trotskyists focused on the building of the Workers' Party as a broad party and ended up... with some of their members becoming ministers in a neo-liberal Workers' Party government.

Their personal opinion was that the Syriza congress had shown "a slight right turn"; despite that, "30% resisted". The basic parameters are the same as with the Workers' Party and Brazil. The Workers' Party was a radical party like Syriza, but then turned right wing. The evolution of Syriza has been quicker, in the years 2004-13 where the Workers' Party evolution spanned 1979 to 2005.

"There needs to be a compromise between Syriza's wish for more centralism and components like Kokkino. People organised just as a 'tendency' can much more easily be incorporated into reformism. It's more honest to keep component status. If we don't insist on keeping the components, we will have the same result as in Brazil".

Kokkino has worked with DEA and Apo, two other Trotskyist-oriented groups in Syriza, on a joint venture called Rproject. We asked about it.

"It's a new attempt, under development. It is popular inside Syriza - in fact, the third or fourth most popular website on the left".

Why is its name in English? "Rproject - resist, reclaim, revolt".

"We are internationalists. It's R for revolution like V for vendetta".

It seems that using English in Greece has become a token of cosmopolitanism, as the use of French was at one time in England, or in the same way as the word ciao spread from Italy to Germany, many Spanish-speaking countries, and England. According to another Greek comrade we spoke to, if you accidentally jostle someone else on a bus in Greece, you say "sorry", rather than using a Greek word. At the OKDE summer camp, people said "bye-bye" to each other as they left. If t-shirts have words on them, they are more likely to be in English than Greek. Quite a lot of shops have English names and street-signs. However, one OKDE comrade, Stefanos, told us that in his view the use among youth people of scraps of English as a way of seeming chic is now declining.

The Rproject website is linked to "the Red network", comprising Kokkino, DEA, Apo, and some unaffiliated comrades, which has "lots of activities". At the Syriza congress, the Red network participated in the Left Platform, and helped to develop its texts.

"The alliance of the Red network and the Left Current [formerly of Synapsismos] is the first step in moving Syriza back to the left, although the Left Current still has some traits deriving from the KKE".

What about those on the Greek left who say it is better to organise outside Syriza?

"The fight must be waged inside Syriza. It is not the right time now to step out. The whole political situation obliges us to fight inside Syriza. The elections last year showed that a very big section of society places hopes in Syriza.

"We're trying to prove to the other left forces that we don't have the luxury of time to go round Syriza.

"The society and the conditions are mature to go left, but the majority of Syriza believe that if Syriza moves to the right then it will keep the balance in society. We have not mobilised society broadly enough yet. We must inspire society. A lot of people are doubtful about Syriza and ask what is happening with Syriza's right shift".

What political issues are most important in Syriza? Strathis replied that there is no official Kokkino answer to that question.

At the congress the Left had four amendments, all rejected. One said that it was not feasible to abolish the Memorandum and rely on staying in the eurozone.

Does Kokkino call for Greece to leave the eurozone? "No. Exit is not a demand. But it is a probable consequence of a radical policy".

Kokkino, the comrades said, looks to "Lenin's theory of the weakest link". "The fight begins in Greece and then spreads to the working classes of Europe. We look for solidarity in other European countries".

We asked what debate there had been about the role of municipal councils controlled by the left, by Syriza or KKE. The comrades explained that the municipal police and the school caretakers and all public sector workers are employed by the central government. Local mayors can protest, they can threaten to resign, they can encourage strikes, and some have done so; but mayors don't hire and fire workers.

Is the government weaker? Stathis said that this was a controversial issue, and he could give only a personal opinion.

In his opinion, the government is "embarrassed". There has been huge solidarity for the ERT workers which the government didn't expect. The government is still powerful, for now, but not for long, because the extreme neo-liberal ministers put into place after the Democratic Left resigned from the government coalition will provoke a reaction.

Have the unions shifted to the left? "Yes, mostly, in trade union elections, but not necessarily in the consciousness of the members. Some union federations have become really radical, for example the high school teachers".

Nicos Anastasiadis, from DEA, the biggest Trotskyist group in Syriza, thought the Syriza congress had been "difficult". The majority had tried to turn the congress towards an internal debate about the status of the components, the format for electing the committee, and the election of the president.

That the majority did not win dissolution of the components was a clear victory. But it got its way on the voting for the committee and for the president. The left had a separate list for the committee elections and got 30%, a score it was "more than happy" with.

"There is an effort by Tsipras and the majority to turn Syriza to the right. But it has created many reactions".

We discussed the amendments the left had put at the congress. Nicos agreed that it would not be a victory for the left if the European Central Bank expels Greece from the euro, but it is an eventuality to reckon with.

None of the four amendments passed. There was no counting among the 3500 delegates, but it looked as if they got about 30%, with the biggest vote, perhaps, for the amendment which called for straight refusal to pay the debt rather than a policy of negotiating down the debt.

Syriza, explained Nicos, comprises different segments: organisations in neighbourhoods, organisations linked to the working class, and organisations linked to small employers. All the organisations linked to the working class are with the left; but the Syriza youth are mainly with the majority, except on the Macedonian question, where they are with the left.

The new members who have joined Syriza over the last year are mostly with the majority, partly because many of them come from Pasok, and above all because most of them are not active.

The majority has become more aggressive. Panayiotis Lafanzanis, the leader of the Synapsismos Left Current, was booed when he spoke at the congress. That sort of thing used not to happen in Syriza. Many delegates came to the congress looking neither to the left nor to the majority, but we believe the congress pushed many delegates to the left.

We asked about Rproject and the Red network. Nicos said that the network had held three or four joint meetings recently, but most activity is still by the separate component groups.

Kokkino people in Thessaloniki, said Nicos, are mostly in the central Thessaloniki Syriza organisation, which however is not active. That limits DEA-Kokkino joint work.

DEA has also tried to get joint meetings of the Red network and the Left Current, "but the Left Current is not sure they want that".

What has DEA been doing, week to week? "We are heavily involved in an anti-racist campaign in Thessaloniki. We work to push Syriza into activity. That is often difficult: the majority wants a party of voters, not activists.

"We are involved in the Red network. We also do trade-union work. And there is a campaign about making abandoned military installations into parks rather than selling them off".

Over the last year, Nicos estimated, all the left groups have grown "a little", and DEA likewise.

Nicos thought the government was now weak: "I don't know if it will survive the autumn". Its parliamentary majority is down to a sliver, and that's why it uses force and ministerial decrees so much.

"I believe in September Greek society will try to resist. Teachers will strike whether conscripted [into the army, as the government has done with other strikers] or not. Now the left controls the high school teachers' federation, one of the biggest union federations in Greece.

"The left has also won the leadership of the federations of hospital doctors and hospital workers. They are striking soon".

Kokkino split from DEA because they thought DEA was insufficiently committed to Syriza, so we were slightly surprised to find Nicos often using "we" to refer to Syriza in contexts where we would expect "we" to refer to DEA. He said at one point that he thought that the left in every country should try to create something like Syriza. We said that in many countries that would be a step forward; but to do it you need the starting point of a sizeable leftish product of the decomposition of a big old Communist Party, or some substitute of equal clout. That is not available everywhere, or even in most countries. Nicos seemed to take the point.

We asked about the fact, surprising to us, that at the ERT support demonstration the previous day none of the left groups had been circulating newspapers and leaflets.

"We do distribute leaflets and sell papers, but it is not easy. Most people read papers on the internet, not on paper. Sometimes when there are lots of protests you see the same people on them day after day, and you don't try again to sell

the paper. And on the whole young people won't buy papers.

"But the DEA paper Workers' Left has a good circulation in Syriza. Workers' Left is a 'line' newspaper, oriented not to a broad audience but to people who ask political questions. We make ourselves visible to a broader audience by banners, placards, and flags".

What about unity on the left, especially between DEA and Kokkino?

"We are for the unity of the left. But it's not a fixed thing, not an absolute necessity. The real importance of unity in the left is in creating a current which can build a revolutionary party. It is not just about joining together a few small revolutionary groups.

"Our disagreements with Kokkino are not so much ideological as a matter of practical politics. Kokkino originated as a split from DEA. They wanted an orientation to a broad left party. Now, after Kokkino's split, the Kokkino residue say we must build a revolutionary party. They have changed. But there are still issues of style of work.

"I don't want to over-generalise, and I know Kokkino in Thessaloniki is different from Kokkino in Athens. But, for example, Kokkino in Thessaloniki recently organised a march against the killing of stray dogs and cats [which are numerous on the city's streets, presumably as a result of pauperised people abandoning their pets].

"It wasn't a bad thing to do, but DEA didn't consider it a priority. We think Kokkino tends to find issues that no-one else is dealing with, and try to make its mark on those, rather than dealing with the larger issues.

"But it's not necessarily the same with Kokkino in Athens.

"In Thessaloniki, we work with Kokkino in Syriza, but they don't do much in the anti-racist movement or other areas where DEA is active. That may change. We have learned things from the comrades in Kokkino - for example, they were the first in the Greek left to campaign on LGBT rights - but we think they tend to decide what they do according to what they think can bring a gain for their organisation in a short time".

Relations with Antarsya, Nicos said, were closer than before. "They are interested in what happened in the Syriza congress. They don't want to join Syriza. They believe that they will gain from the disappointment if Syriza moves to the right. We say they're wrong, and that no-one on the left will gain in that case.

"We work with Antarsya in the unions. For example, there is a coordinating committee of more militant first-level unions in Thessaloniki, which is mainly Syriza and Antarsya people. But it meets only once every two months or so, mainly to organise marches and that sort of thing, and with only a dozen or so people at the meetings".

It has been hard for the left to make gains in universities, said Nicos. "Some students will go on anti-Memorandum marches, but there is no campaign within the universities". Within Antarsya, it is NAR and ARAN and ARAS which have some foothold in universities, rather than SEK. SEK "does only high politics in universities"; other left groups deal only with students' economic issues; "we try to do both, but it's difficult".

Some things that Nicos told us suggest that more mobilisation may come soon in universities. At present Greek university students pay no fees, and they get housing, canteen meals, and textbooks free. The government is moving to end all that provision. There are already problems because university caretakers and canteen workers are not being paid, and fees have been introduced for postgraduate courses.

In high schools? "There is no left presence among high school students, other than the KKE youth. Most students despise politics. And Golden Dawn have a presence in high schools". Golden Dawn is weaker in Thessaloniki, but that is partly because New Democracy in the city has a strong extreme right wing, almost clerical-fascist.

The church is still a strong force in politics? "Yes. The Archbishop collected 70,000 signatures against a Gay Pride festival. And the church can mobilise young people, too. All the clerics are paid by the state, the church pays no taxes, and it owns a lot of property. We say that the state should not support the church, but the Syriza majority don't want conflict with the church. Only a minority of people still attend church every Sunday [the best guess available on the web is 27%], but the majority go sometimes, at Easter and so on. And "a priest can help you find a job... And Orthodoxy is identified with Greek patriotism".

We also had a brief discussion with Nicos about international questions. Nicos said there had been no real debate in the

Greek left about Islamism. He was dubious about describing Iran as regional-imperialist or sub-imperialist, but could see the sense in describing Turkey as sub-imperialist. Greek capital has some of the same traits, he said, with its large financial investments in other Balkan states and the decisions by some Greek industrialists to move production there.

We asked Giannis Vogiatzis, from Xekinima, the Greek socialist group linked with the Socialist Party in England, what Xekinima had been doing since we were last in Thessaloniki, in July 2012. "Dealing with Syriza and Golden Dawn. Doing whatever it takes. Watching Syriza and intervening".

Xekinima joined Syriza in 2008, but left in 2011, just before Syriza won a big surge of support. When we talked with Giannis in 2012, it looked as if Xekinima might rejoin Syriza. It hasn't, but it has had some of members, including Giannis, join Syriza as individuals.

"Syriza remains the main left alternative which could under certain conditions make the difference, but the left is the minority in Syriza. Everything still remains open. If Syriza wins the election, life will become very difficult in a very short time for the Syriza bureaucracy.

"Syriza will face specific demands, on the debt for example. We want the whole debt repudiated. We have to prepare to confront international capitalism. We need a transitional programme spelling out what to do with the banks, the shipowners. We cannot confront them by ourselves. We will confront them in alliance with the European south. But Syriza is moving to the right".

Did Giannis agree with the opinion of Nicos Anastasiadis, that the new recruits to Syriza have mostly aligned with the majority? Giannis did not think there had been any real influx into Syriza. He reckoned the membership was almost the same as a year ago, and in fact some members were leaving Syriza or becoming inactive because Syriza was not left enough.

But, he said, the revolutionary left is not growing either. "People are just watching".

Giannis was active with Xekinima in Pasok in the early 1980s. "Life in Syriza is easier than it was in Pasok. In Pasok people believed Andreas Papandreou [the founder and leader of Pasok]. Now no-one believes Tsipras.

"Syriza could easily go back down to 4 or 5% of the electorate. We can then tell people, 'we told you so'. We have an audience. In Thessaloniki, Xekinima has about 50 members. All the revolutionary groups have an audience".

Among young people? "More among older people. At our Xekinima summer camp this year, for the first time in 23 years, we have provision for children, so that parents can come" [rather than the group being able to assume that almost all those coming will be so young that they will not have children].

Is there a shift to the left in the unions? "Yes. In the Workers' Centre of Thessaloniki [whose committee is elected by the 250 'first level' unions in the city, with a total of 100,000 members] Syriza has doubled its representation. People are coming over from Pasok to Syriza, though that is a problem because it can turn Syriza right".

What does Xekinima say about the euro? "We do not want to leave the euro, but we have to be prepared for expulsion. We have to coordinate with the workers across the south of Europe. Part of Antarsya say that we have to leave the euro, and then so help us god. We say the coinage is not the main problem. The main problem is the fight for our transitional programme. We have to fight capitalism, whether with the drachma or with the euro".

We questioned Giannis again, as we had done in 2012, about the discrepancy between Xekinima's view and that of the Socialist Party, which backed a "No2EU" slate in the 2009 Euro-elections and may do again in 2014. He would not be drawn. "Every part of our international will have its own ideas on what's best for its party. We talk with the SP, but we decide".

What did Giannis make of the recent KKE congress? "The KKE keeps on saying that the KKE is the only revolutionary grouping in Greece. The KKE says Syriza can change nothing, and they are right about that, but they couldn't answer the dilemma posed between May and June 2012, whether it was better for Samaras to win or Syriza. The KKE has lost members, and lost wider support too"

Visiting the Greek left, July 2013

We arrived in Thessaloniki on the evening of Wednesday 17 July. First we went to an estate agent to collect the keys of the flat where we would stay.

That taught us that estate agents in Greece are not like the archetypes of the US middle class described in Jeffrey Hornstein's book: the typical estate agent seems to be a voluble, affable, casual, slightly scruffy young man in polo shirt and shorts.

Then we went to the Thessaloniki headquarters of the public broadcaster ERT (Greek equivalent of the BBC), where a workers' occupation is defying the Samaras government's decision to shut down ERT. The building was covered with union banners. On the pavement outside and opposite was a crowd of supporters. Some hundreds gather there every evening: apparently it was 2000 at the start of the occupation.

On Wednesday evening - as the next evening, when we came past ERT again - there were many left-wing banners there, some attached to buildings or railings, some carried on poles. Despite that, on both evenings the gathering seemed more like a social occasion, with people chatting, than a political forum. There was music, not particularly political; on the Thursday evening there was a fast-food van.

On Wednesday evening there were a couple of short speeches, and then the crowd formed up to march to Aristotelou Square, in the city centre. The comrades of the Trotskyist organisation OKDE told us that the initiative for the march had come from members of NAR, leaders in the local teachers' union, who have promised the possibility of linking up with a bigger crowd in Aristotelou.

On the way, the OKDE comrades used their megaphone to lead chants - for a political general strike, and others - and there are also a few chants led by a megaphone on the contingent with the banner from Pame, the KKE's (Communist Party's) political front. However, there were no paper-sellers and no leaflets.

The OKDE comrades told us that they had a leaflet, but were keeping it to distribute to the bigger crowd in Aristotelou. In the event the bigger crowd wasn't there. And their paper? "We sold them all yesterday, when there was a general strike". Later, Nicos from DEA (a Trotskyist group within Syriza) told us that demonstrations involving roughly the same crowd from the left are sometimes so frequent that on the second or third time out activists don't bother trying with their papers.

Spiros from OKDE told us that the KKE - the major, defining organisation of the Greek left from the 1920s onwards - has no tradition of public paper-selling, maybe in part because it has spent so much of its life under one or another dictatorship. Its paper Rizospastis circulates through news-stands rather than through hand-to-hand sales. On Thursday evening we chanced upon a KKE rally in central Thessaloniki, near the Venizelos statue, and true enough there were plenty of KKE flags but no sign of Rizospastis, or indeed of the assembled KKE members making any effort to spread their message to passers-by.

On Wednesday, having found no large crowd in Aristotelou, we went with the OKDE comrades to a cafe to eat, drink, and chat.

Spiros agreed with the assessment which Sofia Theodoropoulou from Athens OKDE had given me when I met her at the Lutte Ouvriere fete in France in May. The Greek working class is still moving to the left, he said, but it is an unspectacular, molecular process, a matter of "little things". The left is gradually winning more ground in the elections. New "first-level" unions are being formed or revitalised, though against those gains there are losses from the disappearance of unions when workplace shut.

In Thessaloniki, the Biome factory is still operating under workers' control. The 70 workers there make household cleaning materials and sell them themselves, directly to the public. "It is not such a big thing", said Spiros, but the idea of workers whose factories are abandoned by their owners taking them over is becoming more current.

When AWLers were last in Thessaloniki, in July 2012, the neighbourhood assembly movement was reduced to dribs and drabs. A year later, there are more neighbourhood assemblies, some running neighbourhood markets in liaison with suppliers from the countryside to provide food without middleman's profit. It is easier to convene ad hoc neighbourhood assemblies when issues arise. "People have become more disobedient". There is more activity by young workers, even though they are usually not union members.

What have OKDE's main activities been in Thessaloniki over the last year? Spiros reflected and said that the main area had been union activity. OKDE is active in the restaurant workers' union. In the last elections, the slate supported by OKDE got 100 votes. The slate supported by the KKE got 200 votes and kept control, but OKDE's 100 is more than the total number of votes cast in the union election a couple of years ago. OKDE has also been active in the teachers' union and among students.

Pasok, the old social-democratic party, elected to government in October 2009 with 44% of the vote but now a junior coalition partner to the conservative New Democracy and on just 7% in the opinion polls, is "finished", said Spiros. It was never a party which came out of the workers' movement like the British Labour Party or the German SPD. [It was founded in 1974 by Andreas Papandreu, former deputy prime minister in a government of the liberal Centre Union]. It was, said Spiros in a startling analogy, inspired more by the Ba'thists than by traditions of the workers' movement.

On Thursday 18th and Friday 19th we met people from other strands of the Greek left. We will write up reports of those discussions separately, and we have also reported separately on the discussions we had with OKDE about broader questions of world politics and theory.

On the Thursday morning we met Dimitris Souftas of NAR, the biggest group in the Antarsya coalition and one that aspires to a "communist refoundation in which all the communist sub-ideologies will have something to offer". That meeting was in a city centre cafe, "Hemingway", which is "the NAR cafe".

Dimitris has a job with the Institute of Labour (the educational department) of the trade union federation GSEE. Although his wage is only 5000 euros a year, he hasn't been paid since June 2011. How was he surviving? "From odd jobs".

Prin, associated with NAR, and widely sold on newsstands, is the most widely-read paper of the Greek left.

Then we went to another cafe to meet Vasilis Grollios, a Greek socialist whom we first came across when he was studying in Britain. In 2012 he was having to take a seven-hour bus trip to reach work at the only university job he could find in Greece. Now he has a job lecturing at a university in Thessaloniki, but it is part-time and insecure.

Eventually he hopes to find a full lecturer's post. But a friend of his has just got such a job, "in principle". His success means only that he is no.471 in the queue for vacant lecturing positions.

In the evening of Thursday 18th we met comrades from Kokkino, one of the Trotskyist groups in Syriza, at the cafe where Amalia, a member of the Syriza Left Platform and sympathiser of Kokkino, works. Amalia also works as an English teacher in a private school. Vast numbers of Greek school students attend private schools in the afternoons and evenings, after going to state schools earlier in the day, particularly to improve their English.

Amalia explained that everyone in Greek state schools studies English from the age of nine. The second language taught in Greek schools used to be French, but it changed in 1999.

Why, we asked, is the teaching of English in state schools considered so inadequate that the private schools thrive? The classes are too big, said Amalia. In the private schools they are no more than 12, and really she considers five or six the maximum for language teaching.

We heard the same opinion about class sizes from others. Why this applies to language teaching, and less to other subjects, we still don't understand.

On Friday 19th we talked with Nicos Anastasiadis from DEA, the bigger Trotskyist group in Syriza. Nicos is a maths teacher in a state school in a small town outside Thessaloniki. We met Nicos at the Arch of Galerius, one of the sizeable structures remaining in Thessaloniki from its time as an important city in the Roman Empire.

There were more posters plastered round the Arch, and elsewhere in Thessaloniki, and more political graffiti too, than in July 2012. We had asked Amalia of Kokkino about that. Yes, she said, that is true. The left has grown only a bit over the last year, but there is "more will". "Things are harsher".

As in 2012, Thessaloniki does not at first sight look like a city plunged into pauperism. The street cafes are bustling, the buses run frequently and cheaply; there are shuttered shops, and there are beggars, but no more than in British cities. This is not like the Omonia district of Athens, which has plunged.

A street cafe in Thessaloniki. The drink is "frappe" - made by whisking instant coffee and sugar into a froth with a little cold water, then adding more cold water and ice

But we know that one of the reasons why poverty is less visible in Thessaloniki is that things have got worse. In 2012 there were large numbers of African and Asian migrants selling small items on the streets of Thessaloniki, usually from sheets spread on the pavement. Now there are few. The migrants have not found steady jobs: the cops have chased them away.

When workers have huge pay cuts, or lose their jobs, the blocks of flats in which they live do not immediately turn into slums. The workers' clothes, when they go out onto the streets, have not been instantly transformed into rags. But the working-class anger is there.

On Saturday 20th we went to the Venizelos statue in central Thessaloniki to get the coach organised by OKDE to go to its summer camp in western Greece. As we were waiting there, three other groups of people with tents and backpacks assembled, boarded coaches, and left: to go camping by the seaside in July or August is not something only Trotskyists do.

The coach travelled along the Egnatia Odos, the main east-west highway of Greece, built between the 1990s and 2009. The highway is named after the ancient Roman Via Egnatia, which ran from Constantinople west through Thessaloniki to the Adriatic. The portion of it in Thessaloniki itself, also called Egnatia, is on the same route as the Roman road, but further west they diverge: the Roman highway took a more northerly direction, to Durrës in modern Albania.

The modern road goes through mountainous terrain - 76 tunnels and 1,650 bridges - though the mountains are mostly not high, and are green - covered, and sometimes densely, with small trees right up to their summits. Traffic on the highway seemed very light for such a major route. Along the way there was no sizeable city except Ioannina, and mostly only isolated buildings or small villages.

Taking a small track for the last small part of the journey, we reached the campsite in which OKDE had booked a section. The site is a large, well-serviced area right next to the beach, and OKDE had set up, near to the area for their tents, a drinks-and-snacks kiosk, a bookstall, an area with cafe-type tables, and an area for meetings.

Through the week, there were political sessions from about 10:00 to 13:00 each day, and then from 18:30 to about 21:00. After 21:00 there were films, music, poetry readings... In the afternoon, people slept, played (many children came), swam, played chess or other board games, chatted, read, relaxed. The sun was warm, bright, and constant without being oppressively hot, and the sea clear and ideal for swimming.

On the Wednesday, we took a trip to the nearby ruins of the Roman city of Nikopolis and to the river Acheron, after which the river separating this world from Hades in Greek mythology was named. For some of its length you can wade across the Acheron fairly easily both ways, but I guess its mythological significance derives from a section where it runs through a canyon with steep walls either side.

The political sessions included: Turkey; Cyprus; the Greek revolutionary socialist movement between the World Wars; the life and ideas of Pantelis Pouliopoulos; the struggle against fascism and war; the crisis of contemporary culture; workshop sessions for students, for teachers, and for other workers to discuss OKDE activity in those respective fields; and presentations by two of the invited socialist groups from other countries, one from AWL on "Third Camp" Trotskyism and one from Lutte Ouvriere on the political situation in France and the PSA Aulnay dispute.

People from an Albanian socialist group and from the French group L'Etincelle also attended.

On Sunday 28 July, the camp ended, and we returned to our daily duties in the class struggle, in Greece, in Britain, and elsewhere.

Discussing with OKDE

OKDE, the Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece, is a revolutionary socialist group of 80 or so members, mostly young. It is stronger in Thessaloniki than in Athens, and has groups in some other cities. It publishes the monthly *Ergatiki Pali* (Workers' Fight).

AWL first met OKDE at the annual political festival organised by the French revolutionary socialists of *Lutte Ouvriere*, in 2010. Since then AWL comrades have attended OKDE's summer camps in 2012 (Ed Maltby and Dan Rawnsley) and 2013 (Tom Harris and me), and we have visited Thessaloniki and Athens to discuss developments in Greece with them (2012: Ed Maltby and me). An OKDE comrade spoke to AWL's 2013 summer school by Skype, and we also met them and talked at the *Lutte Ouvriere* fete again in 2013.

OKDE is active mainly among restaurant workers in Thessaloniki, telecom workers in Athens, teachers, and students.

OKDE is not the biggest revolutionary socialist group in Greece. SEK, the group linked to the SWP in Britain, is said to have maybe 400 members. There are two or three thousand in the Antarsya coalition, in which SEK is the second-biggest group after NAR, a group aiming for a "communist refoundation in which all communist ideologies will have a part". There are some hundreds of activists in the Trotskyist groups within Syriza, DEA and Kokkino.

However, 80 focused and well-organised activists can sometimes make a bigger impact than much larger numbers in a loose coalition. OKDE posters are as visible as any other group's in Thessaloniki, and on the march from the worker-occupied offices of ERT (the Greek equivalent of the BBC, which the government wants to shut down) to Thessaloniki city centre which we joined on 17 July, the OKDE contingent was as big and as loud as any.

Notably, many of the day-to-day leaders in OKDE's political work are also its leading trade-union activists: it doesn't have the tendency which plagues many revolutionary socialist groups for activists heavily engaged in trade-union work to become immersed in it and semi-detached from the general political activity of the group.

OKDE is respected by other activists. People from Kokkino told us they found OKDE "dogmatic but friendly". Vasilis Grollios, an unaffiliated Marxist in Thessaloniki, told us, approvingly, that he saw OKDE as like "council communists". OKDE would not take that as a compliment; but what Vasilis was referring to was OKDE's emphasis on workers' self-organisation.

In some ways our discussions with OKDE remain more valuable than with other revolutionary socialist groups in Greece: a talk with OKDE yields more sober detail about what is happening, what the group is doing, and what the results are, than with others more inclined to grandiloquence or vagueness.

Yet we often find ourselves more in agreement on some political issues with groups other than OKDE.

OKDE are outside and very critical of the official "Fourth International", the continuator of the political networks for which Ernest Mandel was the chief theorist and writer until his death in 1995. Yet they are "Mandelites" - much more loyal to Mandel, his close associates, and their theories, than are the official post-Mandelites.

The current issue of *Ergatiki Pali* carries a tribute to Mandel on the 18th anniversary of his death. None of the official post-Mandelites is likely to have published such a tribute. Their attitude to Mandel is not unfriendly, but rather "that was then..." OKDE, however, values its tradition, and its status as the direct lineal descendant of the OKDE founded by Pantelis Pouliopoulos in 1934.

AWL has been critical of "Mandelism" since the very start of our tendency in 1966, and we have become more sharply critical over 47 years of experience. We have, however, seen the "Mandelites" as the mainstream, the most serious and substantial representatives, of the "orthodox" Trotskyism which diverged from "Third Camp" Trotskyism in the 1940s, and in that sense superior to the more screeching and incoherent, but self-proclaimedly more "orthodox", variants of that political current.

That OKDE takes its old Mandelite stock of ideas seriously, and will not lightly discard them, is a virtue, so long as it is not an absolute bar to critical discussion.

From our vantage point, then, OKDE is a three-sided entity. All three sides - the focused rank-and-file worker activism,

the tenacious Mandelism, and some elements which (so we will argue) are more like "screeching Trotskyism" - are integral to the triangle, though they seem discordant to us. There is cause for much more discussion.

Here is an account of some of the discussions when OKDE generously invited us to its summer camp in 2013 and offered us the chance to lead a full session, to contribute in other sessions, and to converse with some of its leading members.

We had a formal OKDE-AWL discussion session, in two parts, with a leading OKDE member, Iraklios, with another OKDE member, Stefanos, acting as translator. Since we'd discussed current developments in Greece already with other OKDE members, we asked about OKDE's political and theoretical tradition.

OKDE separated from the "official" Mandelites (or post-Mandelites) in 2004, dissenting from their 2003 congress decision which amounted, more or less, into converting their network into a think-tank and resource-centre for the building of "broad anti-capitalist" parties. What did OKDE think were the roots of that turn in the previous theory of that political current?

In the late 1980s we started expressing disagreement with the FI's policy of unifications with Maoist groups, for example in Spain and Germany [where a segment of the Mandelites, led by Winfried Wolf, joined with an ex-Hoxhaite group to create the VSP in 1986: it didn't go well]. We were at the congress in 1992 when broad parties were proposed as a tactic and expressed disagreement.

We separated in 2004, when the Fourth International wrote "broad parties" into its statutes, making them more than a tactic, and dropped the idea of constructing a world revolutionary party and programme, and national sections.

We were not officially a section then, but that is when we separated politically. We think Mandel continued until his death in 1995 to oppose the abandonment of building sections, though he agreed with broad parties as a tactic.

That doesn't mean everything was correct until 1992. The broad parties question was not the only problem. There were also problems about the assessment of the economic crisis and of the strength of the reformist parties, and of Trotskyist identity.

We think they started to believe that Trotskyism was good up to the death of Stalinism, but irrelevant after that. They stopped believing in the working class.

How come you were not a section in 2004?

We were the Greek section of the Fourth International until 1986, and had been since 1938. In 1986 some people quit to merge with another group and form OKDE-Spartakos, and they were recognised as the section. [They still are today]. There were no real political differences in the split, and we continued to think of ourselves as part of the Fourth International.

The context was that the whole Greek revolutionary left had grown fast after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, and then it declined, especially after the PASOK election victory in 1981.

In 2004 we dropped our claim to be the section of the Fourth International. We applied to be permanent observers, but were fobbed off.

The "broad parties" line comes out of the official FI's disorientation after the collapse of the Stalinist states in Europe and the USSR in 1989-91. What they had described since the late 1940s as an ongoing "rise of the world revolution", creating workers' states (though deformed ones) in country after country, suddenly collapsed, either through mass popular revolt against the supposed workers' states or by their governments moving fast enough for a conversion-from-above to market capitalism before they faced open popular revolt. In 1991 the LCR in France officially decided to re-discuss the whole issue of the nature of the Stalinist states, but it never did. Instead it boxed that period off and coined the slogan: "New epoch, new programme, new party".

As an organisation we are not able to fully understand how the change came about in Eastern Europe and why the USSR collapsed. But there were other factors in the FI's turn - lack of faith in the working class - seeming strength of the reformist parties - defeats of the working class. In the late 1990s some of them were saying that capitalism was going into a new long wave of expansion and no revolution was likely for maybe 50 years.

Yes, but that is because for 40 years before 1989 the supposedly ever-advancing "world revolution" had been defined for them centrally by the victories of Stalinist or Stalinising movements which they insisted were not Stalinist - the Titoites in Yugoslavia, then Mao in China, then Castro in Cuba, then the Vietnamese, then the Sandinistas in Nicaragua... They had to face the fact that those "advances of the world revolution" had been hollow, and there were going to be no more like them.

We disagree. The FI looked at more countries than just Yugoslavia, China, and so on. It was also active in the industrialised countries, in France in 1968 for example.

To be sure. And I don't doubt that in France, for example, they wished and worked for the working class to make a revolution. But the world perspective was defined by the actually-existing revolution in Cuba, Vietnam, etc. The JCR/LCR in France defined itself at the start as "Trotskyist-Guevarist", rather than Trotskyist, and in the years after 1968 invested great hopes in the Vietnamese Communist Party, which it defined as an "empirically revolutionary" party. Everything they did was informed by a theory which told them that the second half of the 20th century was a time of advancing "world revolution", with the advance being defined by Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc. What do you think of that basic theory?

We think the basic theory about the 20th century was correct. It is not just a matter of Mandel's writings: basically, we support the documents of the Fourth International until about 1990. We should look back at the history and revise what was wrong, but we believe that was the best current of the movement.

In Nicaragua after 1979 they failed to press for building a revolutionary party, and there were other mistakes here and there, but generally they were right. We don't think the theory was as you describe it.

Daniel Bensaid, the main theorist of the official "Fourth International" after Mandel's death and until Bensaid's own death in 2010, drastically, though in our view inadequately, criticised the old theories. He argued that it was wrong to have seen the Stalinist states as "deformed workers' states" or "post-capitalist". [In fact, in the official tribute volume for Mandel, just the year after his death, post-Mandelites were already rejecting Mandel's "deformed workers' states" formula, and you find few post-Mandelites defending it today]. What do you think of Bensaid's arguments?

We don't know his writings, but we don't have a high opinion of him, because he was one of the supporters of the broad party strategy.

What other currents have you discussed with?

We've had a limited capacity to make contacts. We have had some contact with the former Irish group of the Fourth International, with Voix des Travailleurs [a group formed by activists who were expelled from Lutte Ouvriere in 1997; they later joined the LCR] with the Morenists of the LIT, with the Fraccion Trotskista [an ex-Morenist current] and, mostly, with Lutte Ouvriere.

Have you learned anything from your discussions with Lutte Ouvriere?

No, we haven't had theoretical discussions with them. We believe the rebirth of the Fourth International will have to come from a synthesis of different ideas.

Your membership is mostly young. So you've grown mostly since 2004?

We have only one comrade from the 1960s, Sofronis. There are six or seven from the 1980s, a few from the 1990s, but over half our members have joined since 2004-5, won in the movements about globalisation and war.

In fact the organisation was practically reborn in 1983, from just two or three comrades. For a while our members were mostly students under 21 years old, but a lot of those have now left student life and entered working-class sectors, so the average age of the organisation has increased.

What do you use in the organisation for political education?

Mandel's Introduction to Marxism, with some commentaries. But most of the education and consolidation of our members comes through our interventions. We print the documents of our congresses, which happen every year or two years, and we have published many of Mandel's writings in Greek. But in the last two or three decades people don't want to read much.

We have created a study programme of 30 titles. It includes many Marxist classics, Salama's and Valier's introduction to political economy, and three or four books about the history of Greece.

Twice each year we hold a Marxist school, with four sessions in each school. It is open, but mainly for our members. At the summer camp, the sessions are usually about current events, but it is a bit different this year to mark the anniversary of the death of Pandelis Pouliopoulos [the founder of Greek Trotskyism].

One thing we have learned, and partly from discussions with comrades from the region, is about the reactionary nature of Islamism, and the fact that there can be revolutions, as in Iran, which produce regimes worse than before the revolution. Connected with that lesson is our view on Israel and Palestine: we support self-determination for both nations, the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs.

Iran? It was a revolution. The Islamists dominated. That was a step back. We're not sure whether the result was worse than before. In all regimes, for example semi-feudal ones, the number one priority is to oppose imperialist rule. Imperialism is the number one evil.

But which imperialism? The Iranian state is itself a regional-imperialist or sub-imperialist power, dominating non-Persian subject nationalities like the Kurds and the Azeris, deploying its army in Syria, sponsoring Hezbollah in Lebanon, exerting dominant influence in Iraq...

Iran is not anti-imperialist. Maybe the Iranian government opposes US imperialism, but not imperialism in general or capitalism in general. At most there is a tendency of anti-imperialist movement there. The Arab masses feel that at least the Islamists oppose imperialism. The defeat of Islamism is important, but we must not overlook opposition to the USA.

We oppose US imperialism, but we also oppose reactionary expansionist powers in conflict with the USA. Like Stalinist Russia. If you want to call the looting and oppression which Stalinist Russia imposed on Eastern Europe something other than imperialism, then you have to recognise that this "something else" was just as bad as imperialism.

I don't know about that. It is US imperialism which poses the threat of wiping out humanity through nuclear war. Israel-Palestine? It's complicated. I don't think the national question there can be solved without a socialist federation in the region. Of course we don't think that the Jews should be driven out, but the existence of the Israeli state depends on US imperialism.

Historically, that is not true. The US has backed Israel heavily since 1967, but Israel was created in 1948 by a war against British imperialism and its allies. The US imposed an arms embargo on Israel at the time, and Israel depended on a decision by Stalin to supply it with arms by way of Czechoslovakia.

In any case, we don't support Israel's alliance with the USA, or its oppression of the Palestinians. We support the Israeli Jews' right to national self-determination.

Do you think there can be a peaceful Israeli bourgeois state?

As much or as little as there can be a peaceful bourgeois state of any other nation. Every capitalist nation with a state which acquires a certain level of strength has expansionist and aggressive tendencies, but it is possible for the pressure of neighbouring states and of the working class within the state to keep it relatively peaceful. That is as true of the Israeli-Jewish nation as of any other. There is no special vice of the Israeli Jewish nation which means that it cannot be allowed the same right of national self-determination as other nations.

We think the existing Israeli state must be overthrown.

By the neighbouring Arab states? That is conquest, not a programme of peace or democracy.

No, the bourgeois Israeli state must be overthrown by the Israeli masses, not the Arab masses. We support self-determination for the Palestinian people, but we doubt whether a bourgeois Palestinian state can be viable.

We think OKDE's attitude is something on the line of the old Mandelbrot formula of "a socialist federation of the Middle East, with self-determination for the non-Arab minorities: Israeli Jews and Kurds". The formula leaves it vague what we advocate now as the basis for winning some immediate redress for the Palestinians, and for creating the regional working-class unity which alone could make a socialist federation possible, but in many interpretations it is closer to

AWL's attitude than are the "smash Israel" views of many others on the British left.

On the Israel-Palestine question, the OKDE bookstall carried a pamphlet by Michel Warshawski and Jacob Taut. These are writers on the old Mandelite line: Taut wrote in 1969: "This state [Israel], whose creation we criticised... is now... a fact, the elimination of which by whatever Arab forces you care to think of would only lead to new misfortunes, murders and killings".

For much of the summer camp I was wearing Gush Shalom t-shirts proclaiming the aim of "two states" in Israel-Palestine: I got neither the censure those t-shirts get from the SWP milieu in Britain, nor the approval they often get from less pickled sections of the left.

We resumed the discussion with Iraklios the next day. That time it was his turn to ask the questions, and he asked us about political and social developments in Britain, not about our theories and views on world politics.

A couple of days later we got a discussion with Sofronis, the one comrade in OKDE who goes back to the 1960s.

In a summer camp session on Pouliopoulos, Sofronis had mentioned his conversations with Christos Anastasiadis, so we started by asking about Anastasiadis.

What we know from the web about Anastasiadis is this: he was born in 1910 in Izmir, studied law in Athens, joined the Archeo-Marxists in 1929, and then the splinter from the Archeo-Marxists which merged with Pouliopoulos's group in 1934. He was one of Pouliopoulos's closest co-workers.

After World War 2, Christos Anastasiadis led the segment of the Greek Trotskyists aligned with Pablo (Michel Raptis) and Mandel, as against a segment closer to Healy (led by Loukas Karliftis, which did not finally separate to make formal links with Healy until 1963-4) and a segment led by Agis Stinas which was influenced by Cornelius Castoriadis and faded away in the 1960s.

Anastasiadis worked as an editor and proof-reader at the mainstream leftish newspaper To Vima, translated copiously from French, and died in 1987 at the age of 77. His pen-name in the Trotskyist press was Th Thalassinos.

So Sofronis knew Anastasiadis?

Yes, especially after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974.

When did Sofronis join the Trotskyist movement?

1963.

And Anastasiadis was still active?

Yes, he remained active in the Trotskyist movement until he died in 1987.

This was confusing, but I suppose the story is that Sofronis, as a young man before 1967, knew Anastasiadis as the senior leader of his organisation, but not well. Under the dictatorship communications would have been difficult. After 1974, maybe, Sofronis was in the leadership of the organisation and working more closely with Anastasiadis.

There was an important development of the Trotskyist movement in Greece in the 1960s, although there were two splits. There was a split linked to Healy, and an in-between group. The group led by Christos Anastasiadis was the biggest of the three. It did entrust work in EDA [the legal front organisation of the illegal KKE, and by all accounts a much looser and more open organisation than the Stalinist KKE] and independent work.

Under the dictatorship there was a big split, to do with the Democratic Committees of Resistance. [We don't know what this refers to, and did not pursue it]. Then after the Athens Polytechnic uprising of 1973 and the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, there were many Trotskyist groups. I don't consider the SWP [UK] Trotskyist, but their group became active then, and there were three or four groups with links to the USFI.

Initially the group linked to Healy was strongest. Then it declined after a couple of years, and now there is no Healyite group.

EEK?

It is not exactly a continuation of the Healyite group. The old Healyite group broke up at the end of the 1980s, when Healy started acclaiming Gorbachev as the leader of the "political revolution" in the USSR, and most of its members dispersed or joined Synaspismos.

Anyway, in the 1970s OKDE gathered many fragments from the other Trotskyist groups, and by 1976-7 it had about 300 members and an important intervention in the working-class movement. Then the whole movement declined.

The 1986 split?

It was not very political. It was carried through by the United Secretariat, because they knew we had never been yes-men.

This was confusing, because the old Mandel Fourth International (United Secretariat), whatever its vices, never imposed rigid conformity on its groups in different countries. Sofronis continued:

There were always some people who had studied in France or in Belgium...

I suppose it may have been a matter of "young Turks", fresh back from Paris, who disliked the old leadership round Anastasiadis without having worked-out differences.

Trying to discern the political complexion of OKDE as it was in the 1980s, I asked what they had thought about the dispute over Nicaragua in 1979. In June 1979 the Sandinista guerrilla movement overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, and a big political crisis hit the FI. The American SWP was moving away from even nominal Trotskyism very fast after the death of Joseph Hansen in January 1979. It endorsed the Sandinista leadership to the point of supporting its expulsion from the country of some members of Latin American FI groups who, in an off-the-cuff effort to intervene, had constituted themselves as a "Simon Bolivar Brigade" and come to Nicaragua to join the very last stages of the Sandinista uprising. Those Latin American FI groups, under the leadership of Nahuel Moreno, broke away from the FI and linked up briefly with the "Lambertist" current centred in France. Mandel and his close associates steered a middle course, praising the Sandinistas but reserving some criticisms.

Nicaragua? We more or less agreed with the USFI, except that we wanted the creation of a revolutionary party in Nicaragua, which they didn't.

This was not a detail. Irrespective of the practical ability or otherwise of small Trotskyist networks actually to build parties of their own in Nicaragua, or previously in Vietnam, Cuba, China, Yugoslavia, the debate for or against that building was about whether independent working-class politics should be counterposed to the Sandinistas (or Ho Chi Minh, Castro, Mao, Tito) or whether the Trotskyists should instead position themselves as polite critics and advisers.

So I asked: and were you for the building of a Trotskyist party in Cuba, too?

Yes.

And what about the whole syndrome? About the FI's stance against building Trotskyist parties in China (before 1969), Vietnam, Yugoslavia? Sofronis seemed to think that we were polemically exaggerating, or inventing things about the history.

The differences on China and Vietnam were not so big. It is true that the position of Mandel, Maitan, and Frank was not so clear. They were carrying a lot of illusions, for example in Guevara. But the differences were not so big.

In one summer camp session, in passing, Sofronis mentioned the massacre of Vietnamese Trotskyists in the 1940s by Ho Chi Minh - a massacre usually glossed over by Mandelites - but evidently he saw such glossings as errors on the edges, and not as we see them, as central indices of the entire orientation of the Mandelite FI for a whole era.

What did he make of the slogan "new epoch, new programme, new party" adopted by the LCR and others after 1991 (because, in our view, they did see the enthusing for "world revolution" in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, etc., as central, and now recognised that no more "world revolution" of that sort was likely soon)?

In the early 1990s we had poor contact to follow developments. We did not know fully what was happening. We

understood better later. It was a disastrous policy.

What was OKDE's own assessment of the fall of the Stalinist states in 1989-91?

It was not the political revolution [as Mandel himself first described it]. It was the collapse of Stalinism. It was not counter-revolution.

OKDE had apparently been very weak in the 1980s and 1990s. How had it been able to grow again, especially since 2004-5?

We managed to create a leading group. The organisation defined its areas of intervention according to what it could do - among workers and among students. Then there were big movements to intervene in. We could expand to cities other than Athens and Thessaloniki. We carried out important publishing work and our own theoretical work.

Sofronis was anxious to be off, and we concluded with two questions arising from the summer camp session on Pouliopoulos. How did Pouliopoulos get access to Trotskyist literature in 1927, when the Russian Left Oppositionists were isolated and there was no international Left Opposition network? And on what sources might Pouliopoulos have been drawing in his comments on dialectics in his prison notebooks, which suggest an affinity to Gramsci but cannot possibly have been influenced by Gramsci?

I don't know where Pouliopoulos found Trotskyist literature. He was fluent in many languages, so there are many possibilities. There are no references to Gramsci or Labriola in Pouliopoulos's prison notebooks - only to Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and so on...

And Plekhanov?

Maybe Plekhanov.

The bookstall at the OKDE summer camp showed us OKDE has published 37 books since 2001. The publishing peaked in 2005, with seven titles. Of the 37 titles, nine are Marxist classics (Marx, Trotsky, etc.); six are OKDE's own work; 19 are translations of works by Mandel or his close associates; two are the memoirs of Margarethe Neumann and Leopold Trepper; and one is a text by Robert Brenner on the current crisis.

The three most recently published are Greek translations of Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, of Brenner, and of the 1969 book by Livio Maitan (a close associate) of Mandel) on China.

We asked Stavros, another leading member of OKDE, about their choices for translation.

The translations, he said, had been done by Iraklios with some help from younger comrades. Why choose Maitan's 1969 book? "Because it was the best book on China from that tradition". Why choose China as a subject? "Because there was a lot of interest in China from the militants". Not for reasons of self-armament against Greece's numerous Maoist groups? "Not at all" - the Maoists are in decline, and not confident on the China question.

To us, this is a puzzle. Activists interested in China now must want to know about its dramatic conversion to world-market capitalism, and about the scathing indictments of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution published recently. Maitan's book will not help on those issues.

The next translations? Stavros reported no definite plans: there are financial difficulties.

I asked also why OKDE had chosen Brenner's text to publish. "It seemed to be in line with the 'long wave' analysis". This is a puzzle, too.

In his 1972 book Late Capitalism, Mandel adapted the ideas of the 1920s Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev about capitalist development proceeding in "long waves" of expansion, then stagnation, generated according to Mandel by big fluxes of technical innovation. He constructed a table (p.130-2) from 1793 to his day of four up-waves, and four down-waves. The longest "wave" had been 32 years, the shortest 19, and the average 25.

This pointed towards a new "long wave" of expansion starting around 1991 (25 years after the start of the "long wave" of stagnation which Mandel dated from 1966). In his last years Mandel argued that the turning-points between waves are not automatic, and that in the early 1990s the conditions for a new up-wave had not yet been met.

Maybe Mandel made a mistake within his own framework, and there was an up-wave from the late 1980s or early 1990s until 2007. Or maybe the "long wave" formula has now broken down. Or maybe it was never right. But when OKDE talk, as they do, of a continuous "worsening of its [capital's] crisis as well as of the crisis of the international bourgeois leadership", with no prospects of any up-wave, that is not a "long waves" view, even if they use the term "long wave".

Brenner's analysis is completely different. He depicts a one-off long period of capitalist expansion from World War Two to the late 1960s, generated not by a rhythmic flux of technical innovation but by global imbalances. The levelling-out of those imbalances led to "ruinous competition", and then to the world economy getting stuck in a long-term rut of industrial over-capacity and continued ruinous competition.

There has been much debate about Brenner's work, to which we have contributed. It is very different both from a scheme of relatively regular long waves across the centuries, and from a scheme of inevitably ever-worsening crisis.

One of the summer school sessions was offered to AWL, and we used it to explain the idea of "Third Camp" Trotskyism. We will report the objections raised from the floor of the session, but not our responses.

Iraklios: This is just a first discussion, a beginning of a discussion. Of course it is difficult to explain to workers that the Stalinist states were degenerated workers' states. But we cannot avoid the problems by choosing a different label.

If you say that the Chinese or Vietnamese revolutions led to bureaucratic collectivism, then you put the Russian revolution into question too. Why make a revolution, if all it will produce is bureaucratic collectivism?

Stavros: The foundation of revolutionary Marxist politics is the idea that capitalism is in decay. But how can you sustain that if you deny that China, Vietnam, and Cuba had socialist revolutions?

Millions of people in China sacrificed their lives for the revolution there. They couldn't have been fighting just for bureaucratic collectivism. You can't deny that the masses in Cuba were happy with the revolution there. If the Stalinist states were bureaucratic collectivism, doesn't that mean that the whole future of humanity is not socialism, as we thought, but bureaucratic collectivism?

Sofia Theodoropoulou: If the Stalinist states were bureaucratic collectivism, then what kind of state is bureaucratic collectivism? If they were a kind of state capitalism, can you explain whether the law of value operated there, whether there was a free market there? What were the laws of motions of this bureaucratic collectivism or state capitalism?

Other comrades: Is it useful going back over old history like this? The Trotskyist tradition shows us how not to follow the popular fronts, and how to fight the class struggle, and that is what we need today.

Yes, there were killings in the Stalinist states. But Western states also killed people. States are not divided between those which kill and those which don't.

If we take the logic of revolutions like the one in China not being socialist revolutions, then we would end up saying that the bourgeois revolution in France was not a bourgeois revolution because it resulted in Napoleon becoming emperor. Even the most successful socialist revolution, however, cannot really succeed unless there are socialist revolutions all over the world.

One notable thing, to me, was that these were "what if" responses - arguments not directly against our assertions about the Stalinist states, but that if one accepted those assertions, then one would have to accept some difficulty.

Although we referred frequently to China in our responses, no-one came back with specific counter-claims about China, or with references to Maitan's book as an source of information. No-one used the argument from the supposed "welfare-state" benefits of Stalinist states for the working class (full employment, cheap public services) which was the backstop retort of the Mandelites in Britain in the last period when they were willing to debate the nature of those states. No-one referred to texts from Trotsky (though in the last year of his life he turned, wrongly we think, against the "Third Camp" alignment) or to the political degeneration of Max Shachtman in old age.

Discussion sessions at the summer camp included: Turkey; Cyprus; the Greek revolutionary socialist movement between the World Wars; the life and ideas of Pantelis Pouliopoulos; the struggle against fascism and war; the crisis of contemporary culture; and workshop sessions for students, for teachers, and for other workers to discuss OKDE activity

in those respective fields.

In the session on Turkey and Cyprus, Iraklios spoke about the question of the EU. He argued that relief within the EU is improbable, because "Germany is not the USA. It cannot do Marshall Plans".

In any case, the EU's specific problems, he argued, are not only its internal imbalances, but the weakening of the position of the EU as a whole in world trade. (But the share of Europe in world trade has long been weakening as industry rises in China, India, Korea, Brazil, etc. It is not clear that this is a crisis, any more than the more-or-less continuous fall in the UK's share of world manufactured exports, from 46% in 1872 to maybe 4% today has meant continuous crisis in the UK for the last 140 years).

However, Iraklios also said that Greek exit from the EU is "not a proposal which can solve the crisis. If all member states exit the EU, the crisis would only deepen. And for now exit is an influential idea only in Greece, though there are second thoughts elsewhere". (I think in fact the polls show that exit from the EU is far more popular in Britain than in Greece).

"In Greece, supporters of this view say that Greece could retrace the pre-euro past. They cite the model of Argentina after it broke the link between the peso and the dollar". (This is done especially by the left-wing economist Costas Lapavistas). "But Greece does not have the same industrial base to expand exports that Argentina had". (Argentina gained especially from huge soya exports to China). "And these people forget the price paid by Argentina. Argentina cannot be a model".

The indicated conclusion would seem to be that socialists should agitate not against the euro and the EU, but for workers' unity against capital across the EU. In fact Iraklios concluded: "It is necessary to exit the EU, but to combine that with control of the economy by the masses, and nationalisation of key sectors of the economy... Our proposal to exit the euro is not aimed at autonomous national development, but as a first step to reunify Europe on the basis of a Socialist United States of Europe".

In other sessions OKDE speakers explained that OKDE has a baseline "emergency programme" which it strives to promote in every struggle: cancel the debt, exit the EU and the eurozone, nationalise the banks and industry under workers' control.

Nationalisations of key sectors and workers' control would be good, but why they should be presented as add-ons to exiting the EU is puzzling. Of course, a workers' government implementing such measures could find itself expelled from the EU or even blockaded, but it does not follow that we should want exit from the EU "in itself", or welcome it any more than we would welcome a blockade.

I made some of those points in a contribution from the floor, but the session included no final summation from the opening speakers, and so I never got a reply.

In the session on the Greek workers' movements between the war, Stavros noted that the KKE had assumed that capitalist Greece must be either "imperialist" or "a colony". Pouliopoulos, by contrast, located Greece in the world economy more precisely, as neither an imperialist world power nor a colony or semi-colony, but instead a second-rank capitalist power with its own regional ambitions for domination and expansion. Stavros also noted that few countries then had similar status, but many do now.

In the sessions on Pouliopoulos, there was discussion about the slogan of "an independent Macedonia and Thrace", launched by the KKE in the 1920s. It was for advancing that slogan, in line with Comintern policy, that Pouliopoulos was jailed.

There had been a real basis for it. When those regions were first incorporated into Greece, after the Balkan wars of 1913, Greeks were only a minority there, and less numerous than either Jews or Slavs in the biggest city, Thessaloniki.

That changed with the influx of refugees from Turkey after the 1919-22 war between Greece and Turkey, who most came to that north-eastern part of Greece; negotiated population exchanges with Bulgaria and Turkey; and a tendency among remaining Jews and Slavs to assimilate to a Greek identity. In the 1920s the slogan was dictated more by the Comintern's and the Bulgarian CP's efforts to ally with Macedonian nationalists of IMRO, a parallel to the Comintern-imposed switch of the Yugoslav CP to demanding independence for Croatia.

There was also discussion about the Archeo-Marxists, who were the first Left Opposition group in Greece, and strong

enough for a while to rival the official KKE. Pouliopoulos stayed separate from the Archeo-Marxists after being excluded from the CP in 1927, and was able to get official links with the Trotskyist movement only in 1934 when the majority of the Archeo-Marxists turned away from the Trotskyist movement and a minority split off to unite with Pouliopoulos. Pouliopoulos never after 1934, not even by word of mouth, said he had been wrong about the Archeo-Marxists, but OKDE speakers argued that in fact, in view of the sizeable working-class base of the Archeo-Marxists, in fact he was.

Comrades from Lutte Ouvriere gave a presentation on the political situation in France in one summer-camp session. To promote debate, I asked them for their view on the agitation in France from both the far right (the Front National) and a section of the far left (POI/ Informations Ouvrieres) for French exit from the euro or EU as an answer to the capitalist crisis.

They replied that workers are not interested in such agitation. The French Communist Party sometimes tries to divert social issues into vague agitation against "Brussels", but half-heartedly.

Iraklios intervened. French government debt is predicted to rise to 96% of GDP in 2014. And then France will face a Memorandum, like Greece. What will you say then? Won't you have to decide then whether Europe is good or bad?

The LO comrades replied: It's not just Europe. And it is not our debt to pay. Our discussions with workers do not focus on the debt, but on the class struggle. The answer is to get out of capitalism, not out of the euro or the EU. Brussels? It is not just "Brussels". The big corporations, French, German, and Greek too, all have their offices in Brussels to lobby the European Commission. To blame "Brussels" is to divert from the battle against the bosses.

We think LO is right on this. We were ready to intervene to support them, but further interventions from OKDE did not respond to LO, and instead turned the session to other issues.

The indefinite political general strike

In one session we asked: for what objectives do OKDE propose the indefinite political general strike? We understand well why revolutionary socialists in Greece should agitate for purposeful indefinite all-out strikes to step forwards from the 20-odd 24-hour or 48-hour general strikes held in recent years, and from the recent indefinite sectional strikes defeated because particular groups of workers hit by the Memoranda were left to fight on their own.

But in OKDE's agitation, we thought, the indefinite political general strike had become a cure-all, a formula covering up inadequate political alternatives.

The question brought no response in the session, but afterwards I talked with Stavros. The indefinite political general strike, he said, is to bring down the government.

But if you can mobilise an indefinite general strike, I asked, why focus it on removing the government, i.e. getting a new election? Look at France in May-June 1968. The calling of an election demobilised the general strike, and the demobilisation of the general strike gave the right a big majority in the election. When conditions exist for a general strike, better focus it on a clear-cut social demand - scrapping the Memorandum, reinstating suspended public-service workers - while retaining the opening to develop further demands if the strike settles in and generates local workers' committees and councils to run services, supplies, and self-defence.

Stavros replied that he saw the problem. OKDE also calls for the scrapping of the Memorandum, the cancellation of the debt, and the nationalisation of banks and industry under workers' control. It demands unions call General Assemblies for workers to control their struggle, and sees those as crucial.

But the indefinite political general strike is a starting point, because it is a way out of the current dead-end. OKDE, he said, advocates a workers' government based on the self-administering groups of the movements.

Those self-administering groups, however, mostly do not yet exist. The idea of a workers' government plays little role in OKDE's agitation.

I could have added that for OKDE to call on workers to make an indefinite general strike to remove the government is odd when in May-June 2012 OKDE did not think it worth the effort for workers even to vote out a similar government. (OKDE reckoned it impractical to run its own candidates, and made no recommendation about voting in those elections, instead campaigning to build up workers' self-organisation).

In a discussion among OKDE's school teachers, one of them asked what sense it made focusing teachers on the call for an indefinite political general strike to bring down the government. If the strike succeeded, then there would be an election and another government. So then we'd call for another indefinite political general strike to bring down that government? And the next government, after the next election? And the next? In other words, the call begged the question of an alternative government.

Syriza

We discussed with OKDE comrades in 2012 about their decision to stay outside Syriza and not even to back voting for Syriza in the May-June 2012 elections when OKDE itself had no candidates.

In that discussion, the OKDE comrades did not make the argument of the KKE and some in Antarsya, that the vote for Syriza represented a rightward shift by the working class. They said that the vote for Syriza represented an important leftward shift by the working class. But their arguments against the post-Mandelite "broad parties" orientation seemed to have left them insistent that organisational separateness is a principle.

A session in the summer camp discussed the Archeo-Marxists, who were the first Left Opposition group in Greece, and for a while the biggest Left Opposition group outside the USSR. In 1934 the leader of the Archeo-Marxists, Dimitris Giotopoulos, parted ways with the Trotskyists, and later took his organisation into the "London Bureau" with the ILP and the POUM; a section of the Archeo-Marxists split away and united with Pouliopoulos to form a new Trotskyist group in Greece.

From what I know from Trotsky's writings, the up-front issue between the Archeo-Marxists and the Trotskyists in 1934 was the "French turn" - Trotsky's proposal that the French Trotskyists join the French Socialist Party as a faction. I asked about that. OKDE comrades did not respond; but doesn't the episode raise questions about the Syriza issue today? It does not answer those questions. We can't cut-and-paste tactics from different eras for today. But it raises questions.

The crisis

When we first met OKDE in 2010, we read a document from May 2007 which they had translated into English. That was from before the eruption of the current capitalist crisis, and at a time when Greece's economy was still growing tidily (its GDP grew nearly 50% in 1997-2007, twice the EU average). Yet the document talked of the "world capitalist system... unable to get out of its 35-year-old crisis", and with no prospects but "the worsening of its crisis as well as of the crisis of the international bourgeois leadership".

We argued that it is a misuse of the word "crisis" to apply it to conditions persisting for 35 years and more, and that in fact from the mid-1980s global capital had much improved its profit rates and expanded into new areas. This all came together with attacks on the working class, but it is not only in crisis that capital attacks the working class.

Since then Greece has been plunged into depression and pauperisation which, on all foreseeable capitalist options, will continue for long. We have not argued with OKDE about their descriptions of the economic crisis: it seems churlish and pedantic to complain about inexactness or exaggeration in such times.

However, the report we had from the comrade from L'Etincelle at the summer camp of his meeting on behalf of his group with OKDE (Iraklios, Stavros, and Stefanos) suggests that we should have argued.

The OKDE comrades told him that all the countries of Europe, France for sure but also Germany, are ineluctably headed towards a plight like Greece's. The next step after that is world war, in which humanity will be destroyed by nuclear weapons.

No qualifications, no references to countervailing tendencies or other possibilities, were entertained.

The summer-camp session the morning after the L'Etincelle-OKDE discussion was about the struggle against fascism and war. Much of it was general and historical. One comrade from the floor pointed out that Stalinist regimes had been similar to fascism, and sometimes worse: why? An argument was made despite the dangerous rise of Golden Dawn, the conditions do not exist now in Greece for fascism.

After a speech by Sofronis, Tom asked: "Did Sofronis really say that the US is turning towards fascism?"

My attention had been slack - my written notes had only: "The main danger today is the US bourgeoisie". We asked Maria, our translator. She thought Sofronis had said that the US was the country most likely to go fascist. She wasn't sure, so she checked, and came back to tell that Sofronis had really said that if the US goes fascist, it will destroy the world.

The vast over-armament of the US state is a threat to human survival even without a fascist coup, and a reminder to us that the choices may not be even socialism or barbarism, but rather socialism or annihilation. Yet in order to win socialism we need assessments which discern the ups as well as the downs of capitalist economy, the favourable tendencies as well as the unfavourable.

On all four points - exit from EU, indefinite political general strike, separation from Syriza, proclamation of ever-worsening crisis - contingent and limited political constructs are cathected so as to give them the same fixity and emotional charge as the idea of the socialist revolution itself. That syndrome existed in pathological form in the Healy tendency; and in other forms among many others who would not question the basic ideas of the "orthodox" Trotskyism shaped by Mandel and others in the 1940s and early 50s, but wanted somehow to stiffen the inevitably mushy, speculative, naively-hopeful bias of a world-view centred on discerning strands of socialist-revolutionary advance in distant upheavals led by maybe-not-quite-orthodoxly-Stalinist forces. It was "screeching Trotskyism".

Greece: the simmering revolt

Ed Maltby and Martin Thomas visited Thessaloniki and Athens between 4 and 9 July to find out more about what the Greek left is doing. This is their report.

To build too much on quick impressions is foolish. Not to formulate impressions is worse than foolish. It leaves us guided only by generalisations and summaries which reach us only after being filtered by others' preconceptions.

Foolishness can lead to learning, by way of us formulating impressions and having them shown to be wrong (and why). Flat reliance on general formulas given in advance cannot.

That said, here are our impressions of a week in Thessaloniki and Athens talking and listening to people from many different strands of the Greek left and labour movement.

Greece is simmering. It is not boiling. It is not simmering down, either. New open eruptions are likely, but in the autumn rather than now.

Syriza, the left coalition which soared from 4.5% in the 2009 election to 27% in the June 2012 poll, on a programme of reversing the Memorandum agreed by Greek governments with the EU, ECB, and IMF, and nationalising the banks under social and workers' control, plans to convert from a coalition into a party, and has set itself the aim of building a mass membership linked to Popular Assemblies in neighbourhoods.

Syriza economist John Milios talked of a target of 200,000 members. Miltos Ikononou, Syriza leader in Thessaloniki, cited a more cautious target of increasing Syriza membership in the city to 5000 from about 2000 today and 1200 a year ago.

Miltos told us that the planned Popular Assemblies have already started, with 100 at a first local open-air meeting in Thessaloniki. Other activists were more sceptical about how fast Syriza can or will go with the Assemblies, especially over the summer, when activity usually dips if only because of the heat.

One activist particularly sceptical of Syriza, Mihalīs Skourtis of OKDE-Spartakos, opened his conversation with us by stating that the main thing is that, after the relative lull of the two election periods, all the organisations of the Greek left and radical left must get back on the streets. Now! Then he explained that, realistically, by "now", he meant after the end of August.

We learned a bit about trade union structures in Greece. In Greece, a "union", or a "first level union" anyway, is made up of workers in a particular firm or workplace or trade.

The Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre, for example, covers 250 "first level" unions, with a total of 100,000 members. The smallest of those unions has 22 members; the biggest, the local bus workers', almost 3000.

The "first level" unions have sizeable autonomy. They can and do call strikes by assembling their members and having an on-the-spot vote. Workplace activists in Greece, unlike in Britain, do not have to go through a complex process of getting a remote national union leadership to run a postal ballot for a strike.

However, wider action depends on the higher "levels" of the union structure. There, things are not so good. The higher-level union offices and officials are (or have been) paid for by the government. They can and often do preside over dormant and neglected "first-level" unions. They can call one-day or two-day general strikes — sixteen of them so far — without serious follow-up and without serious organising in the workplaces.

Things are changing. Union posts come up for election every two or three years. Spiros, an activist with the Trotskyist group OKDE in Thessaloniki, told us: "Within the next six months or a year, the old Pasok officials will be voted out of the union leaderships. The biggest gainers can be the far left — more a broad spectrum of unaffiliated far left activists than the organised far-left groups.

"In the unions you can't really separate Syriza and the far left. They work together. Sometimes rank and file Syriza activists are more left-wing than rank-and-file activists of Antarsya" [a coalition of ten revolutionary groups, which criticises Syriza harshly as rightward-moving reformist].

Other activists put it more cautiously, but agreed that big changes in the union leaderships are probable.

The other twist here, which must tend to shake things up even apart from the union elections, is that for some months now the Greek government has stopped paying the trade-union centres' bills and the union officials' wages. The government says it will sort out some new arrangement sometime, but has not said when.

Some activists suggested to us that Greek society is still in a process of emerging from decades of depoliticisation.

Giannis Vogiatzis, a long-standing activist of Xekinima in Thessaloniki, was very pleased with the large number of copies of its paper which his group had sold when Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras came to speak during the election campaign in Thessaloniki's huge Aristotelous Square.

But, he noted ruefully, even then the square was not quite full; and Pasok and New Democracy had attempted no open election rallies at all in Thessaloniki. In the 1980s, he recalled, both Pasok and New Democracy election rallies would fill Aristotelous Square right from the sea front to the Venizelos statue.

Greece has probably as many different Trotskyist groups as Britain, and a swathe of other revolutionary groups more coloured by the tradition of the now diehard-Stalinist KKE (Communist Party of Greece).

Spiros from OKDE told us that all the currents of the revolutionary left have grown markedly in the crisis. "Nobody has doubled", he cautioned. Some groups told us they had indeed doubled, or more.

In any case, the Greek revolutionary left is visibly more youthful and zestful than the British. The groups are smaller than they are in Britain, but they have a population one-fifth the size to draw from, and in proportion to population they are surely bigger.

We talked with many different groups. With OKDE, we ran up against stubborn political differences on attitudes to the European Union, on its call for a "Constituent Assembly", and on attitudes to Syriza; but found their assessments of political life careful and thought-provoking, and their serious approach to work in trade unions and neighbourhood organisations undeniable. We found a group we knew very little about before we came to Greece, Kokkino, instructive and lucid.

Time is needed for the revolutionary left as well as for the general processes of politicisation. More or less the whole revolutionary left has the broad idea that they can win large numbers of workers to revolutionary socialist organisation as the reformist leadership of Syriza is put to the test and found wanting. Some also point to a risk that if the revolutionary left cannot achieve that, then demoralisation which will follow the Syriza leadership being put to the test and doing badly will throw the political initiative into the hands of the far right.

Yet the revolutionary socialist left is divided by large differences: over attitudes to Syriza, over attitudes to the euro and the EU, etc. For it to surge forward, it will need to unify — or at least, some sizeable chunk of it will need to unify — around a political synthesis achieved through thrashing out those differences.

All discussions on political evolution in the Greek working class are in the shadow of the bulk of the KKE, which is Greece's oldest political party and arguably also its most deeply-rooted. The KKE was down to 4.5% of the vote in June 2012 (from 7.5% in 2009, 8.2% in 2007). Stefanos from OKDE told us that despite the KKE's revolutionary-ish dialect, its life is in fact heavily focused on electoral success, and the electoral setback is grave.

KKE systematically organises its own demonstrations and rallies away from the main activities of the trade unions and the left, even on general strike days. When many thousands of young people come to events like the annual Anti-Racist Festivals in Thessaloniki (29 June/ 1 July) and Athens (6/8 July), all the rest of the left are there, but absolutely not the KKE.

Andreas Kloke from OKDE-Spartakos told us that the KKE is “the most right-wing part of the movement, and also always trying to split the movement” — and this despite the fact that Spartakos is a member in good standing of the Antarsya alliance, which in its official comment on the June election result deplored the fall in the KKE vote as “not a positive thing”, as indicative of the movement becoming less radical.

KKE stands like a large stone in the way of a flow by the Greek working class towards revolutionary socialist politics. Time will be needed, again, to wear that stone down sufficiently, or push it aside.

In May 1917, in the maelstrom of the Russian Revolution, Lenin struck his keynote as follows: “We Bolsheviks must patiently and perseveringly explain our views to the workers and peasants. Each of us must forget our old view of our work, each, without waiting for the arrival of an agitator, a propagandist, a more knowledgeable comrade who will explain everything — each of us must become all in one: agitator, propagandist and Party organiser. That is the only way we can get the people to... think over their experience and really take power into their own hands”.

That politics in Greece may need a good run of “patiently explaining” does not mean that times are dim. However, the rise of the Golden Dawn neo-Nazis may limit the time for “patiently explaining”. They got 7% of the vote in both the May and June elections.

Assessments on the Greek left vary. Some say that the bulk of the Golden Dawn vote is atomised and incoherent protest, and social agitation and action will undercut it. The SEK (Greek group linked to the SWP in Britain) calls for the Greek state to ban Golden Dawn, though the Syriza reformists we discussed with did not. Some anarchists resort to single combat with Golden Dawn over the heads of local communities. In any case, no coherent and united response by the left to Golden Dawn has emerged yet.

When we went to the Trade Union Centre in Thessaloniki, a water worker, Costas, not only answered our questions about water privatisation in Greece, but also asked us a question. Is Thessaloniki as we expected? One of us replies that what we have been told by many people indicates that there is great trouble and suffering behind closed doors, from unemployment and poverty.

Yes, replies Costas. Things look “normal” in and near the city

centre. But it is different further out. “People are sleeping in doorways, and sorting through garbage heaps to find something to eat. That didn't happen before”.

Costas believes that the trade unions in other countries “must inform people that the problem with have in Greece is a problem will have in every country. It is a system problem. When they are done with us, and with Spain and Italy, they will go on to others, maybe France.

“We have to change the rules where everything is privatised and everything goes to a few people”.

Both Thessaloniki and Athens look at first sight as if they were built in a hurry, by erecting long rows of middle-rise concrete-box-buildings, from about the 1960s, and at the edges sometimes slapdash, though in the centres round patches of Roman, Byzantine, or classical ruins. In and near the city centres, there are some shuttered shops and cafes, and some beggars. But nothing dramatic. The remaining cafes have plenty of people sipping iced coffee through straws, playing backgammon, and chatting. Public transport works, rather better than in England. In the evenings, when cooler temperatures arrive, hundreds of young people sit and stroll round the White Tower in Thessaloniki, chatting and socialising rather than raging or rioting. Superficially, Greece today looks less like a country in the grip of crisis and acute decay than Thatcher's Britain or Volcker's and Reagan's USA did in the early 1980s.

There are political posters on the walls, but not a huge number. As in France, for example, graffiti on walls are more common than in England, but mostly not political. In a week we saw only one public street paper sale or stall by the left, an ineffectual group of KKE youth trying to sell Rizopastis. The main papers of the left — Syriza's Avgi and Epohi, the KKE's Rizopastis, and Prin (from the New Left Current, the biggest group in Antarsya) sell mainly through newspaper kiosks and newsagents. (Unlike in Britain, a law obliges the wholesalers to supply all papers above a certain print-run, without discrimination against the left). The cities do not look like Lisbon or Oporto in 1974-6.

But to be suffering, outraged, thoughtful, rebel-minded, does not necessarily mean to parade the streets looking “abnormal”, with a rictus of rage always on your face, or ostentatiously in rags.

Yanis Varoufakis, Greece's best-known economist, says that now: “Greeks are in a catatonic state one moment, in a state of rage another”. What looks “catatonic” to professor Varoufakis may be, in real life, people thinking things through.

"A change in Greece will favour the fighting position of the working classes all over Europe"

John Milios, a leading economist in Syriza and a Syriza member of the Greek parliament, spoke to Martin Thomas from Solidarity in Athens on 7 July 2012.

Q. We have approached a left Labour MP, John McDonnell. He has agreed to contact Jean-Luc Mélenchon to discuss them initiating a European conference of the left and labour movement in solidarity with the Greek left. Our comrades in

France have also asked Mélenchon directly. We think that the new government in Greece is unstable...

A. Yes. They are planning to follow the same policy as before...

Q... and a left government in Greece could become a real possibility again quite soon...

A. Yes. We hope so!

Q. There is a serious risk that the European Central Bank could retaliate against a left government in Greece, for example by cutting the Greek banking system out of the Target2 system for payments within the eurozone [so that euros in Greek bank accounts would no longer be valid buying-power elsewhere in the eurozone]. There is also a possibility of building effective solidarity of the labour movement and left across Europe to stop the European Central Bank doing that...

A. We think that scenario has practically zero probability. It's not easy to exclude one country from the eurozone or from financing by the European Central Bank without it forcing a very rapid revaluation of financial risk all over the eurozone and double-digit interest rates not only for countries like Italy and Spain which already have problems but also for nearly every country. So the scenario is a threat and not really a practical possibility.

Josef Ackermann, the former head of Deutsche Bank, wrote recently that there has to be another big haircut of the Greek public debt, because the debt problem of the Greek economy is an insoluble equation. The crisis started when the debt was less than 120% of Greek GDP. They followed the austerity policies, they lowered the denominator of the debt:GDP ratio, and now we have public debt at 160% of GDP despite the haircut for private bondholders, the so-called PSI.

This is not a situation where they can do anything they want. The European ruling classes have as a main target to restructure the economy and the society away from the so-called European model, the European social state, towards the Asian or Chinese type, with very low wages and with no rights and guarantees for the working classes. Whether they can achieve is a matter of class and political forces.

It is not part of their plans to destroy the eurozone. That fact creates a basis on which we can negotiate.

We will say that the internal situation should be a matter for the Greek people - that is, the Greek government - and if it is a government of the left, then it should decide on the level of the minimum wage and on the collective-bargaining laws and on reforms of the tax system.

According to all accurate economic data, the actual direct tax coefficients in Greece are five to seven per cent of GDP lower than the European average. We have to change that. The rich must at last start paying taxes. We should not tax mass consumption, or the middle or the lower classes of society.

We should put this insoluble equation of the debt to other European countries, the members of the eurozone and the ECB, and say that it is impossible, given the current situation, where we have the deepest recession since the Second World War, to achieve at the same time three goals: to pay 110 billion euros in interest by the year 2020; to have a balanced budget and create a primary surplus [a surplus of government income over spending excluding debt service]; and to have funds to create growth. It is impossible!

It is to the benefit of the European taxpayers to renegotiate the Greek debt. Our direction would be the way that the Federal Republic of Germany renegotiated its debt after the Second

World War, in 1953. The deal contained haircuts, renegotiation of the interest rates, and a moratorium period that made repayments conditional on growth - interest would be paid when the economy started growing again.

This year it is estimated that in Greece we will have a recession of 6.8%. This is an enormous recession. Greece was growing faster than any other country in the eurozone with the exceptions of Ireland and Finland. The average growth rate for the ten years before the crisis was around 4.5%. In eleven to twelve years we had an increase in per capita GDP of 61%.

The debt, as a ratio to GDP, remained constant around 100%. That was due to tax evasion, in part, and mainly to the reduction of tax coefficients for big capital and the rich. The state revenues were reduced deliberately as GDP grew. That has to stop. It has to be reversed. We have to have a more just system and a redistribution of wealth in favour of the working classes.

Q. I agree that a Greek left government could be in a strong position to negotiate with the European Union. However, the leaders of the European Union are as dedicated to the idea of transforming society, social overhead costs, labour markets, in a neo-liberal direction as the Greek left is to transforming them in the opposite direction.

The European ruling classes' calculations will not just be financial. Even if the retaliation is counterproductive financially, I can't see that we can say that there is zero probability that they will retaliate.

A. I believe the retaliation would be not only counterproductive but also disastrous. Also, this is a fight taking place all over Europe - in all countries, even Britain, which is not a member of the eurozone. A change in Greece will favour the fighting position of the working classes all over Europe. We will have a changed situation.

Some governments which were elected on the basis of "a different agenda", even in quotation marks - that is, a promise of a different agenda, despite what they actually do, like the French government - would be under strong pressure to decide on one side or the other.

We have discussed with different European governments, with the IMF, and the leadership of the European Union. Those have not been official meetings, but meetings through institutions which represented, in one way or another, those authorities. We are confident that we can negotiate.

On the other hand, as we have seen from history, there are always mistakes or unexpected situations. We have to have a plan B. And we have a plan B. But this plan B cannot be made public at this point, because it has to do with the whole architecture of the negotiation. I understand your question. The situation is severe, but it is not catastrophic, that is, there are alternatives.

We believe we have to go on to take part in that battle and to collaborate with left parties and trade unions all over Europe in order to change the situation. If things can be changed in Greece, that means they can change everywhere. If things have changed in Venezuela, that means things can also change in other countries.

Of course, it is a very strong confrontation. There are extremists on the side of the ruling elites. We have to be prepared for every possible outcome. But our main course is to continue on an internationalist agenda and fight with other left forces and movements all over Europe for a change over all the continent.

We don't believe it would be a solution to have a situation like the interwar years where the working class of every country was

making its alliance with its ruling class to fight other countries, and other countries were portrayed as the enemy. We do not believe that the enemy of the Greek people is Germany. We believe that the ruling classes of Germany follow a policy similar if not identical to that of the ruling classes of Greece. The ruling classes of Greece could not put forward their plans without the alliance of the German and other European ruling classes along with institutions like the IMF. They hope to make reactionary changes in economy and society irreversible, which of course they are not.

Q. If a left government in Greece wins office and succeeds, what would Greece look like after that? Would it still be capitalist? What are you aiming for?

A. If we sit here in Syntagma Square and look at the people passing by, we cannot understand the situation. The working classes of the country are on the brink of a great disaster. For the first time in post-war history, we have over 20,000 homeless. This is new for the country.

We have an official unemployment rate of over 20%, and 50% among the youth. This means an actual unemployment rate of around 30%, which is disastrous. This cannot go on.

Though the situation is very bad, a left government would first of all stop the declining course - stop this catastrophe - and would care for the poor.

The first measures would be to bring back the minimum wage of 751 euros, because it is impossible to live with less. We will take measures, based on state initiatives and other measures, and start decreasing unemployment and creating positive growth rates.

It is possible, within a very short period of time, to fight corruption. We know that there is a close connection between the big enterprises, both international and Greek-based, with the state, which is expressed in certain laws but also in central contracts. We are going to fight this corruption immediately, to create a registry on an electronic basis in order to have a just tax system and deal with things like evasion of indirect taxes concerning petroleum products.

Greece produces and exports refinery products like gasoline and benzene and so on. It is estimated that we have something between one and a half and three billion euros in tax evasion from that business. It is easy to monitor imports and tax petroleum as it comes into the country.

The whole system is corrupt. We know about the Siemens case [about corrupt deals between Siemens AG and Greek government officials during the 2004 Athens Olympics]. We have evidence that similar things happen with many enterprises, especially those which control the mass media. It is possible to change the situation.

Crucial for us is the participation of the people, both the civil servants who work for the state who are also very anxious about corruption, and also the people who are going to support a left government.

We cannot make any positive step if we do not rely on the people and if we don't get ideas from the people. We are going to be part of the movements as we have been and as we are now. We are going to be the major opposition in the country.

Q. Syriza is launching Popular Assemblies?

A. Yes.

Q. How will they develop? And don't they need to discuss the Plan B?

A. We need to gather the ideas of the people. Plan B has a side

which can not be public and which depends on very specific "technocratic" procedures. In order to fight with the people, we want to create a new mass party.

We have 1,650,000 votes. We believe that from those people who supported us we can create a party of 200,000 members, with the Popular Assemblies linked to it.

We are welcoming new members massively in the ranks of the party, and we want to decide, together with these people and the others who participate in the Popular Assemblies, to create a party capable of fighting this government and the ruling classes.

Self-organisation for workers' power?

We asked many people in Greece about what forms of grass-roots self-organisation exist in the Greek working class or can plausibly be developed towards something comparable - though possibly very different in detail - to the soviets (workers' councils) which were the basis of the Russian workers' revolution of 1917 and which have re-emerged in many revolutionary crises since then.

Tereza from Kokkino said explicitly that given the dominance of small enterprises in the Greek economy, neighbourhood-based committees were a more likely form than factory councils; and everyone described more life and movement in neighbourhood organising than in industrial organising.

Everyone agreed, more or less, that neighbourhood-based assemblies are at a lower level now than before the election campaigns and the start of the summer, during which heat and holidays reduce political activity.

Everyone also agreed, however, that there is potential for neighbourhood-based organisation to grow again as the struggle against the new coalition government's discredited and destructive policies grows, especially from September.

Spiros from OKDE in Thessaloniki said that neighbourhood committees had been formed from the movement in the city squares in June-July 2011. Then there were neighbourhood committees formed in the campaign for non-payment of the new property tax.

Now, said Spiros, "each committee has a special thing. In west Thessaloniki there is a committee to create a self-organised food market and a community restaurant. There is another committee in Kalimaria, in east Thessaloniki, with about 40 or 50 people involved.

"There are a couple of other neighbourhood committees in Thessaloniki where we don't participate. There is one in northern Thessaloniki against plans to develop a toxic waste site there.

"The neighbourhood committees usually meet weekly or fortnightly, but less often in the summer. They aren't elected" (i.e. they are open meetings for anyone who wants to be active).

Vicky Karafoulidou and Yannis Karliamos at the Syriza office in Thessaloniki, who emphasised that they were talking informally rather than speaking officially on behalf of Syriza, told us that Syriza had run "popular assemblies" to "talk to the people and hear their ideas" during the election campaign, and now plans to continue them permanently.

The idea, they say, is to run an Assembly for each neighbourhood of say 10,000 people, meeting once a month usually and "at least once or twice in the summer".

They reckon to get 100 or 200 people to each Assembly (though, they say, an attempt to organise an Assembly at the university was not so successful).

People are and will be informed of the Assemblies by social media and posters, though (because of shortage of resources) not always by leaflets.

There "is a plan", they said, to have these Assemblies, if they develop, elect their own committees, not necessarily of Syriza members.

However, when we spoke later, and more officially, with Miltos Ikononou, a Syriza leader in Thessaloniki, he was categorical that these assemblies will be *Syriza* assemblies.

"We are making open assemblies, and we want to have a Syriza place in each neighbourhood. We are starting to do these assemblies. We had a hundred people to one last week, and others are in the next few days.

"We want new members, but our target is first to involve the people".

So, these are *Syriza* assemblies. What about also building broader neighbourhood organisations, not just of Syriza supporters, with the aim of enabling people to take control of their own neighbourhoods?

"These are the open assemblies of Syriza. People who come, become members of Syriza and then elect committees in their neighbourhoods.

"Our target is to see how we can inspire people to become involved in the cause of Syriza. The basic idea of the left is to fight about one's rights. It's a question of how to inspire the people".

Of the non-payment committees which grew up in neighbourhoods to resist the new property tax and the threat to cut off electricity to non-payers (because the tax is levied on electricity bills rather than through the regular tax system), Vicky and Yannis said that "they come and go".

The government has now conceded that people may pay their regular electricity bill but not the tax addition (at one time, the electricity company was allocating all payments first to the tax, so that any partial payment would leave electricity charges unpaid), and people are not having their electricity cut off.

However, Vicky and Yannis said, there is a neighbourhood committee which was based in that movement still functioning in the eastern part of Thessaloniki.

On Syriza's Popular Assemblies, Spiros was cool. The KKE has run local Popular Assemblies, too, he noted, though Syriza, unlike KKE, participated in the city-squares movement.

"We can have common committees with Syriza", he said, "but Syriza has not been very successful with its local assemblies in the past. Probably it will have some success now, but probably it will fade. Syriza needs a more developed policy".

Sofia, from OKDE in Athens, gave a more downbeat picture. In autumn 2011, after the city-squares movement, OKDE had been participating in local assemblies in five municipalities (areas covering some hundreds of thousands of people), with attendances ranging from 30 to 100 at weekly meetings.

There are none functioning now, she said. OKDE will intervene in Popular Assemblies if Syriza initiates them, but doesn't see

much happening now. She expects things to pick up from September.

Mihalis Skourtis, from OKDE-Spartakos, was more scathing. Popular Assemblies? Syriza is doing nothing, he said, but propagating its electoral programme.

Syriza did nothing against the fascists. The only thing in its mind was the election results. Now OKDE-Spartakos is calling on Syriza to organise open assemblies in the neighbourhoods, to resist the fascists, to organise solidarity, and to combat poverty. But we will see.

Tereza from Kokkino described a local assembly in Athens she participates in. Currently meetings draw a maximum of 20 people, where there were 50 or 100. Tereza was not sure of the population size for the area covered by the assembly, but says it contains three high schools, which suggests a population of about 30,000.

The Syriza committee for that same area, she said, would have thirty people at a general assembly of Syriza members, but fewer for regular gatherings.

Mihalis Skourtis, despite giving the most downbeat picture of the situation now, also stressed the possibilities for the near future.

The movement of neighbourhood committees against the property tax was, he said, a big affair, where in some communities you might have a thousand people meeting weekly. It won a big victory. Non-payers of the tax now do not have their electricity cut off. "The people are still there".

That movement has subsided. But it will re-emerge on other issues. "The people are still there".

The rise of the neo-Nazis

The first people we spoke to about the rise of the Golden Dawn neo-Nazis were Vicky Karafoulidou and Yannis Karliamos, in the Syriza office in Thessaloniki.

They stressed that they could not speak as official and accredited Syriza representatives, but they told us that Golden Dawn is quite strong in Thessaloniki, especially in the peripheral areas of the city where people have never seen an African or Asian immigrant.

They reckoned racism in Thessaloniki as not quite as bad as in Athens, but even in Thessaloniki immigrant workers are too scared to take part in neighbourhood assemblies, for example.

Albanian and Russian immigrants to Greece, from the 1990s, have become quite well-integrated; but then many of them are racist towards the more newly-arrived African and Asian immigrants.

Syriza, said Vicky and Yannis, is for "social defence" against fascism, not "physical defence". Yes, they would support protecting immigrants - and also prostitutes, sometimes also targeted by the fascists - against Golden Dawn attacks, but they didn't want to get into the sort of activity done in Athens by anarchist groups who dedicate themselves to physical combat with the fascists over the heads of the local communities.

Later, Miltos Ikononou spoke to us more officially, from Syriza in Thessaloniki.

"It is not enough to make campaigns against the fascists. Here in Thessaloniki the problem is relatively small, but it is worse in Athens. We have to go into the neighbourhoods, and tell people the problem is not immigrants. It is the government, poverty and so on. We have the same problems as the immigrants. We are all citizens, with the same problems.

"Golden Dawn is strong in some very poor neighbourhoods. There were people who voted Golden Dawn in the first [May] election, and Syriza in the second [June]. The problem is that we are absent from those neighbourhoods. We have to explain that Golden Dawn are killers, neo-Nazis".

But people know Golden Dawn is violent? They saw the attack on TV by a Golden Dawn leader on two left-wing women MPs?

"There are people who said the attack was good, because those women had been very aggressive. But Golden Dawn is not very deeply embedded in Greek society. Greek people have very deep memories from World War Two [when Greece was under Nazi occupation].

And of what happened to the Jews? (Thessaloniki is the only city in the world known to have had a Jewish majority for many hundreds of years of the modern era, from about 1500 to World War Two. Few Jews remain there after the Nazi occupation of Greece in World War Two).

"The young people of Thessalonik think that's a big problem. Not just the left, *all* the people!"

Should the left organise community self-defence against the fascists?

"No. I think that's a mistake. It's wrong to get involved in a street fight with these killers".

But if the fascists attacked the Syriza office, for example?

"That's another case. We are against making counter-demonstrations. Those will make people think we and Golden Dawn are the same. But if it's necessary, yes, we can defend our offices and the immigrants".

Spiros, from OKDE in Thessaloniki, said that Golden Dawn is "a real problem, an product of the crisis". It has rallied "a layer of the population - older people who supported the dictatorship - also some youth, and scared petty-bourgeois".

Golden Dawn is "brutal against immigrants", but what Golden Dawn does against immigrants "is a small percentage of what the police and the state do.

"We want self-defence of the movement. But that starts not with Golden Dawn but with the squares movement. We want to build self-defence committees against the police, against the army, and against Golden Dawn, but Golden Dawn is the easy part. We want to build solidarity of Greeks and immigrants.

"It is not about throwing stones and bottles, but about solid organisation. In Athens [where, by all accounts, Golden Dawn is a bigger problem than in Thessaloniki], the main thing is not the anarchist actions featured in the media, but activity in the unions and communities.

"There are some committees, like Popular Assemblies, in Athens, we want to extend that. OKDE also organises to protect its own contingents on demonstrations.

"Discussion with other organisations is difficult. SEK demands that the state outlaws Golden Dawn. Antarsya has no clear view. There is one other group which has a similar position to OKDE, the Network of Social Rights, which came from a split in OKDE in the 1970s and is now in Syriza".

Sofia, from OKDE in Athens, seemed to oppose the very idea of anti-fascist united fronts, but we think there may be crossed wires or miscommunication there.

She said that whenever Golden Dawn makes an attack, left forces in the neighbourhood gather to initiate a protest, with some hundreds of people from the local community.

For example, there had been a march the day before we spoke, on 5 July, with several hundred people.

With these actions, it is not only an issue of the left, but also mobilises the local community.

"Apart from that, there is so far no central political initiative of the left organisations against fascism.

"Those are the facts. Now I will tell you our position. We are not for a left anti-fascist front. We not for any kind of popular front. We believe that common initiatives, united initiatives, in the movement, for a march or a strike or a demonstration, are one issue. We support those and think those are completely necessary.

"But on the political issue we think there is a huge distance between the reformist left and the revolutionary left. In that sense we are firmly against any kind of political unity of reformists and revolutionary Marxists, against fascism. We think that such left unity, or such popular fronts, are one more step to the defeat of the movement, to the defeat of our socialist goal, and to the defeat of the perspective of the revolution".

So you're opposed to setting up committees in districts, not just to protest after Golden Dawn attacks, but to defend local communities against those attacks?

"Any kind of self-organising in the movement - committee, trade union, march, demonstration, strike - should be united, and we support that unity. That is one thing. In that united movement the current of the revolutionary Marxists should be distinct, with the whole of our programme, with the whole of our criticism of the European Union, with the whole of our criticism of left front government and their results - with Rifondazione in Italy, with the left bloc in Chile in 1973. There is a need for the separate political organisation of the revolutionary Marxists".

So, do any anti-fascist committees exist? "I didn't speak about anti-fascist committees. I talked about committees for cancelling the debt, against the memorandum, against the results of the crisis in total, not only fascism. We do not have a front only against the fascists. We have a front against the social democracy of Pasok and against the bourgeois class as a total, not only the fascists.

"The roots of Golden Dawn come from Pasok and New Democracy. Our front is against the bourgeois class as a total. There is no social democracy as in the 1920s. The recent social democracy of Pasok is a bourgeois neo-liberal party of the European Union, of the memorandum, of poverty, of wars. It is not a social democracy of the 1920s".

What about Syriza? "Syriza, of course, is not a bourgeois party. It is a workers' party, but a reformist one. Of course, nowadays, due to the deep capitalist crisis there is no room left for social-democratic policies - if you won't confront the capitalist system as a total, you cannot guarantee to keep schools and hospitals open - there is no political room for gaining some measures for the rights of the workers - and in that sense Syriza is condemned to prove itself inadequate. It cannot put its social programme into practice.

"If Syriza tries to put its social programme into practice, since it does not confront the capitalist European Union and capitalism

itself, it will have to give up its social programme in order to live with capitalism".

How big a threat did Sofia think Golden Dawn is? "It depends on the future of the movement. Nowadays the major current is not the fascist current. The major current in the working class is towards the left, towards struggles, towards demonstrations, towards left policies.

"We have a major duty to help this movement to self-organise, and to build a revolutionary current in this movement, so that we can move from the strikes and demonstrations to a general strike, and from a general strike to a continuous general strike, and after that prepare the socialist revolution in our country. That is our duty.

"If we are defeated in that duty, then of course fascism will strengthen itself. But nowadays that is not the main issue. Golden Dawn, and fascism in general, will not become the majority in Greek society unless we are defeated in social struggles. Now is the time of the social struggle. If we do not fulfill our duty to bring it to victory, then it will be the time of Golden Dawn and fascism".

Discussions with OKDE members in Thessaloniki suggest that (although Sofia's English was generally very good) there were some crossed wires here, some language-gap problem. Spiros and Stefanos, in Thessaloniki, said that OKDE is in favour of united-front anti-fascist defence groups. The problem is that there is not, so far, a consensus for forming them, and OKDE cannot form united fronts by itself.

Nikos from DEA said that the issue of fighting fascism was a component of the left's general political tasks within the popular movement and should be understood in that way rather than as a special separate activity.

"The ideological struggle comes first. Neither KKE nor Synaspismos have taken this seriously. There is a need for a clear statement that all migrants should be legalised, that they are not the problem but that their illegality is the problem.

"If you build self-organisation in the neighbourhoods then the question of self-defence will arise naturally. There is already a move to develop a network of people to physically defend meetings, rallies and so on. So, if you call a rally and 20 fascists turn up, then you will need some people who know what they are doing, otherwise a big rally could simply be broken up. So, many people in Syriza want to see the development of such a mechanism.

"However, such a mechanism would be purely defensive -not offensive. The problem is political, to do with the broad spectrum of people who organise around the fascists, not the core."

Nikos seemed to suggest that an "offensive" strategy against the fascists would rely in part on "exposing" them:

"Golden Dawn stood in the May elections as an "anti-system" party. In the June election, a large part of the Independent Greeks and LAOS [two more established right-nationalist parties] voted for Golden Dawn. So this segment of Golden Dawn's vote is more consciously fascist. In the wake of the election there is a periphery of conscious racists around Golden Dawn - racists, but not necessarily fascists. If they are exposed as not being really "anti-system", and if their cynical activities - stabbing people and so on - are exposed, their broader support will waver."

I asked Nikos what he thought of the demand recently raised by the SEK that the state should ban Golden Dawn. In the UK, Workers' Liberty opposed a similar call raised by the SWP-controlled Unite Against Fascism campaign, for the government

to ban an EDL march in East London - because we say that state repression used against the right can just as easily turn on the left. As we predicted, the ban on the EDL march in East London turned into a more general ban on all protests over a wide area for a number of months.

Nikos was vague in his answer. He said Workers' Liberty's point of view was "interesting", but that calling on the state to ban the fascists was "potentially useful as when the state fail to ban them, that will expose to people the collaboration of the police with the fascists". He said that DEA's slogan was that the offices of Golden Dawn "should be closed" but they were deliberately ambiguous as to who should close them.

For Kokkino, the question had less to do with "exposing" Golden Dawn and more to do with the political struggle to ensure that Syriza was able to fulfill the tasks that the movement had entrusted it with. Xaris explained that:

"The struggle inside Syriza is currently at a pitiful stage. People are hesitating and afraid. If Syriza cannot protect people against the state, the police and the fascists, then Syriza will fall from 27% to 2.7%. People want radical solutions and if Syriza cannot provide them, the fascists will... What is particularly dangerous is that Golden Dawn is a party of young men. Whereas I would say that roughly a third of Greeks agree in some way with their racist ideas, one in six young Greek men vote for Golden Dawn. A common saying among young people is, "who should I vote for, Syriza or Golden Dawn? There is no-one in between.

"Golden Dawn is already intensively organising solidarity food distribution, volunteer healthcare provision, home help for the elderly and so on - but all for "Greeks only".

To these issues, political struggle and self-organisation are the way to guard against Golden Dawn's rise and hopefully sweep them away. But the issue of self-defence is, for Kokkino, particularly acute:

"The police's collaboration with Golden Dawn is clear. There are two police unions - one is far right, the other is extreme far right. Almost all the police special forces are in the extreme far right union. Whereas 50% of the police vote fascists, I doubt if 3% of police vote Syriza. They can be no help, no defence.

"We need to fight the fascists ourselves - with knives, and maybe soon, with guns. The philosopher of Golden Dawn, Plevris, says that Hitler was wrong because he did not kill all the Jews, and that Golden Dawn can do it better and kill them all. They want to kill all the Communists, Egyptians, migrants and so on. If things go badly, perhaps people like us will have to get a passport and flee abroad."

Comrades from the Maoist organisation ARAN also expressed their views on Golden Dawn:

"There are people who voted for Golden Dawn who are not necessarily fascists in a conscious way. But as Golden Dawn held their 7% in the second round, this shows that many Greeks believe that the main problem is foreign workers.

"We want to show people that Golden Dawn is not anti-systemic but a part of the capitalist system.

"After the elections, they will start to hit Communists and the left. We want to prevent Golden Dawn from infecting our neighbourhoods. In order to do this we must develop self-organisation in neighbourhoods. Golden Dawn have a strategy of taking over neighbourhoods one at a time. The issue with Golden Dawn will be solved in the streets if the left can provide leadership to the working class and the poor. That will defeat Golden Dawn.

"As for physical self-defence, we disagree with SEK that you can deal with the issue by appealing to the state. In fact, that would help Golden Dawn's "anti-system" marketing strategy.

"Organising physical self-defence is not separate from the question of working-class self-organisation in the assemblies. We believe that we should take initiatives to form an anti-fascist f which is led by the left and is accepted, and participated in, by the working class through unions and assemblies. Self-defence is beginning to be discussed at this level.

"Winning left policies in the movement is the best way to resolve the problem. In neighbourhoods where Golden Dawn are strong there is a myth about them helping grandmothers across the road. We must dispel these myths, and organise assemblies in areas where Golden Dawn are strong."

Giannis from Xekinima said: "Golden Dawn got the same vote in June as in May, 7%, but three fewer MPs. 440,000 people voted for Golden Dawn, but they are not all fascists. They voted Golden Dawn because they are disgusted with the political system, and the left, parliamentary and non-parliamentary, failed to convince them.

"Golden Dawn will do well in the polls for a long time. It must be seriously confed with state rules.

"A Golden Dawn leader said that after the election they would go into hospitals, see if there were any immigrant patients there, and throw out any they found and put Greeks there.

"Theoretically, only Greek citizens or legal migrants should be in hospitals, but doctors don't apply that rule. But the state could say that Golden Dawn people raiding hospitals were acting illegally and should be charged.

"That should be combined with movement action. I don't mean fascist-hunting: that would just make them stronger. But we have to have teams ready in case Golden Dawn carries out actions".

We rehearsed the argument against demanding state bans on fascists: that the bans always turn out fictitious or semi-fictitious, and posed in terms that enable them to be used, and more effectively, to suppress left-wing mobilisations.

Giannis didn't disagree, but said: "All anti-fascist actions in the past have failed. SEK wanted a march in a Golden Dawn area in Athens, but the local people said no. If they went on a march, Golden Dawn would see them and kill them.

"If we had good public services, we wouldn't have Golden Dawn. If there were a state, even a bourgeois state, functioning well, then I don't think Golden Dawn would survive".

Talking, back in Britain, with Theodora Polenta, *Solidarity's* main writer on Greece, who reads the Greek press regularly, we found she has a different picture. In her observation, Xekinima's strongest point is its sharp and militant stand against Golden Dawn and in defence of immigrants. Its paper has carried exceptionally good exposures.

Maybe Xekinima has some activists in Athens who are exceptionally committed to anti-racist activity, and write well; but in Thessaloniki, where Golden Dawn is not so strong, Xekinima tends to put more stress on legal action and social agitation to answer Golden Dawn? We don't know.

Syriza wants to make itself a mass party

Edward Maltby and Martin Thomas from Workers' Liberty visited Thessaloniki and Athens between 5 and 9 July to find out more about the ideas and activities of the Greek left.

On our first morning, we went to the Syriza office - rooms above a cafe in central Thessaloniki, with a big Syriza sign on the outside wall. Later we would meet OKDE comrades in the clubhouse, Iskra, which they run. They would tell us about another place "which is a Syriza cafe". On the Sunday we would meet Antarsya comrades in yet another cafe: "one of our comrades runs that cafe, so we get together there every Sunday".

Vicky Karafoulidou was at the Syriza office. Her job there, so she said with a shrug when we asked, is "more or less everything". Over the time that we talked, three other comrades came in, dealt with phone calls, worked at computers. One came from a court hearing where she had been trying to help an Iraqi asylum-seeker defeat deportation.

Thessaloniki is Greece's second city, with a population of about 800,000. (Athens: four million. Greece's total: 11 million). Thessaloniki is 2300 years old, was the second city of the Byzantine Empire, and has many Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman buildings and ruins, despite the destruction inflicted by a huge city fire in 1917.

Yannis Karliamos is an archaeologist. He joined us for most of the conversation.

Vicky and Yannis did not want to give a formal interview. They thought that should be done by an accredited Syriza representative. But we talked for a couple of hours.

Syriza, they said, had been a small party. Suddenly, after the elections on 6 May and 17 June, in which it rose from four and a half per cent of the vote in 2009 to 27%, "we have many more things to do".

Syriza "wants to make a mass party". Greek society has been depoliticised. The first step is to create new local organisations, enable people to join Syriza without joining one of the groups in the coalition that makes it up, and work towards the unification of Syriza into a single party.

How many members does Syriza have in Thessaloniki? "It's difficult to say", Vicky replied. "Depending on how you define it, you could count the number in Thessaloniki at anything between 300 and 2000 organised members, and beyond that friends and supporters". Syriza organisers will have a clearer idea of actual numbers in September and October, when regular meetings get going again after the summer.

The KKE still has more members than Syriza, despite its vote dropping from 7.5% in 2009 to 4.5% in 2012. KKE is the oldest party in Greece, and has local organisations everywhere, including in rural areas and on the islands, and Syriza has not until now.

In Thessaloniki, Syriza committees in the different districts meet once a month, as a minimum. The all-Thessaloniki coordinating committee meets weekly or fortnightly: it depends.

In the unions, said Vicky and Yannis, Syriza members work with Antarsya, and not always "as Syriza". Their aim is to take decision-making in the unions to the lowest level.

Newspapers supporting Syriza, like the daily *Avgi* (linked to Synaspismos) and the weekly *Epohi* (linked to AKOA, another group in Syriza with origins in the old Eurocommunist movement), circulate mainly through kiosks and newsagents rather than hand-to-hand sales, as does the main Antarsya-supporting paper, *Prin* (linked to NAR).

Some of the groups within Syriza - presumably such as the Trotskyist DEA, with its fortnightly *Ergatiki Aristera* - sell on the streets, said Vicky and Yannis, and Syriza itself does stalls on the streets from time to time.

We talked about how Syriza might respond if a left government wins office and the European Central Bank or the EU leaders move to cut it off from the eurozone payments network.

Vicky and Yannis thought that was a "strong possibility" and "very difficult". We'd told them that one of us was meeting John Milios, one of Syriza's leading economists, in Athens the next day, and they thought we'd do better to ask him. (Milios would say that Syriza has a "Plan B", but it cannot be made public at this stage).

The important thing, Vicky and Yannis said, is not whether Greece is in the euro or not, but getting the financial means to deal with the crisis. "We ask Europe to understand how dangerous the current course is, and decide to change economic policy. This is not a Greek crisis, but an international crisis. Decisions should be based on the rights of the people, not the interests of the banks.

"In government, Syriza would press the EU to change policy, and seek to ally with other governments in difficulty, like those of Portugal, Spain, and Italy".

But the Portuguese and Spanish governments are of the traditional right in those countries, and Italy's is a "technocratic" administration?

The governments may be right-wing, Vicky and Yannis acknowledged, but the peoples are not. The governments in Italy and Spain are not strong at all, and so are vulnerable to pressure from below.

Syriza will use its alliances in the European left, and argue that "we are all Greeks". It is a problem that European society does not react collectively and simultaneously; we have to change that.

Our "official" interview with Syriza was on our last day in Thessaloniki, with Miltos Ikononou, a Syriza leader in the city. We returned to the Syriza office. It was later in the morning than our first visit, and the office buzzed with young people hurrying about and phones ringing, frequently interrupting the interview.

Miltos is a teacher by trade, in his late 40s.

First he told us about Syriza's plans on Popular Assemblies: we have recorded those in a separate write-up collecting what we heard about neighbourhood organisation from several different sources.

Then we asked Miltos: if the current government falls, and Syriza forms a left government, what will happen?

"We will have a reaction from the governments in Europe and from the capitalists here in Greece. First, maybe, they will stop the bailout funds. Then maybe capitalists will take their companies and move to other countries - to the Balkans".

How will Syriza respond to that pressure?

"There is an answer, but it is difficult. First, nationalisation of the banks. Restore the minimum wage. Stop privatisation of sectors

like the water companies and the port of Thessaloniki. The details are in our programme".

Some economists reckon that the European Central Bank would hit a left government in Greece by suspending the Greek banking system from participation in the eurozone payments system, so that euros in Greek bank accounts could no longer be used for purchases in other eurozone countries.

Miltos found this question "very difficult". He went next door to phone a Syriza comrade, Christos Laskos, who is a professor of economics, but could not reach him. He suggested we ask John Milios, another Syriza economist, and we explained that we had already talked with Milios in Athens.

We went back to asking about Syriza's party-building campaign.

"Now we have about 2000 members in Thessaloniki, with membership cards. A year ago it was 1200".

And your target? "Five thousand".

What sort of people are joining Syriza?

"Mostly young people from the middle class, students from universities..." Workers? "We have a problem there. We have no very strong workers' organisation in Syriza. The workers vote Syriza, but... We will visit workplaces and talk with workers.

"We will go to the bus depots and talk with bus workers in their lunch break".

The managers won't try to stop you?

"No. Not after Syriza won 27%".

How, we asked, does Syriza explain that Greece will be better with a left government?

"With our social programme. We want the people to support us and get involved. We want something like the Popular Unity in Chile".

A reforming left government, with wide popular mobilisation behind it, held office in Chile in 1970-3. It was overthrown by a bloody military coup in September 1973. So we asked: But with a different ending?

"Yes... Like Chavez in Venezuela. We want a popular government".

Greece under a Syriza left government: would it be socialist or capitalist?

"We believe we can bring a socialist society, our dream, step by step. Of course the first left government of Syriza will have a socialist programme".

What about the possibility of a violent retaliation by the state? [From 1967 to 1974 Greece had a military dictatorship, and its 20th century history included many other military coups].

"In the army and the police there are people who support us. The situation in Greece now is different from 20 years ago.

"The people in the army and the police don't want to be involved in politics".

But 50% of the police voted for Golden Dawn?

"Not of the whole police. 50% of the special [riot] police, MAT. The problem is the education those people have received. When we get government, we will abolish the MAT. We want a different kind of police".

Miltos seemed genuinely perplexed, and asked another older Syriza comrade to talk with us. We re-posed the question, mentioning obstruction of reforming left governments by the top

civil service as well as the possibility of reaction from the army and police.

"I don't know... If there is a violent reaction from them, there will be a violent reaction from the people.

"Most likely is a refusal to cooperate. We had a case here in Thessaloniki recently when there was a problem among the anarchists. Some are more violent, some are more social, but the police arrested them all.

"We could have problems. I don't know how to deal with it. It would be very difficult to change all the chiefs of the police and so on, but maybe that is the answer..."

Plainly the comrades went away to think about it more: since then we've had an email from the Syriza office detailing Syriza's proposals on the police, which do indeed include the disbandment of MAT, demilitarisation of anti-insurrectional special troops, a ban on police wearing masks or using firearms during demonstrations, union rights for police, etc.

The Trotskyists in Syriza

Gianna Gaitani is a Syriza MP from Thessaloniki, and also a member of DEA [Internationalist Workers' Left], a Trotskyist group within Syriza. She spoke to Martin Thomas in Athens, in a brief interval between parliamentary meetings, but didn't want to give a formal interview because she couldn't speak as an official representative of DEA.

Almost all our discussions with Greek leftists were in English, which many young Greeks have some command of, but the discussion with Gianna was in French. She had evidently spent some time in France, though, so she said as she occasionally searched for a word, thirty years ago.

Becoming an MP had evidently been a surprise for her, as an activist from a relatively small group, and she was racing to catch up with the new tasks.

She started by describing the social impact of the EU/ ECB/ IMF memoranda, and especially on the health system. For 30% of workers, their employers fail to pay their health insurance contributions.

Among small shopkeepers (like Gianna herself), 50% do not pay the contributions; and among farmers, 30% do not pay.

The health insurance fund, consequently, cannot pay the hospitals, and the hospitals cannot pay the pharmaceutical companies. Greece's health system used to be ranked 14th in the world, but now there are cases of hospitals refusing to hand over babies to new mothers until they pay the bill.

DEA originated in splinters from the SEK, the Greek organisation linked to the SWP in Britain. It has connections with the ISO in the USA, which was expelled by the SWP from its international network in 2000 after an obscure dispute.

DEA, said Gianna, believes in left unity at the level of activity, though not at the level of ideology. It took part in the European Social Forum and the Greek Social Forum, and in the founding of the Syriza coalition in 2004. It was the first revolutionary organisation to join the Syriza coalition.

Gianna described other activities of DEA, in an anti-racist committee in Athens and in a feminist group called "Women Against Debt and Austerity".

DEA, despite its small size, has become widely known as a result of its activity in Syriza. It sees itself as the left wing of Syriza. There are also quite varied tendencies within Synaspismos, the biggest group within Syriza. Within Syriza, activists try to reach a synthesis of the different views. But "unless people organise themselves in the neighbourhoods, we cannot create a left government". DEA says that it is necessary to organise in a revolutionary perspective. "We have a strong movement here, but it is not organised. It is a question of organising".

Antarsya and KKE people, said Gianna, have an attitude of waiting for Syriza to fail so that they can then scoop up the disillusioned. But the KKE is losing ground because people want something that will block the deterioration of social conditions now.

To Antarsya's and KKE's criticism of Syriza for not proposing that Greece quit the euro, Gianna replied that the struggle "does not depend on the question of currencies. It is not a technical matter. We must look at things much more concretely. The need is not to change currency, but to change policy".

In an interview John Milios, a leading figure within Syriza, had said that Syriza had a Plan B in case of the European Central Bank and the EU leaders organising harsh economic retaliation against a left government in Greece, but it could not be made public. What was DEA's idea of a Plan B? Gianna grinned and said: "The revolution!"

Is unity of the Greek Trotskyists, or at least some move towards unity, possible? Gianna said that DEA has started discussions with two other groups within Syriza, Kokkino and Apo (which in fact are splinters from DEA, created by divisions over the details of how to enter Syriza).

In Thessaloniki Ed Maltby met with Nikos Anastasiadis, a long-standing member of DEA, and with Xaris from Kokkino.

Ed raised the controversy between revolutionaries who operate within Syriza, like DEA, and those who are instead in Antarsya. He put to them the points raised by comrades in the Antarsya subgroup ARAN, for example, that Tsipras had moved right during the elections and was soft-peddalling the more radical elements of the Syriza programme. Marius, from the ex-Healyite group EEK, had predicted that a Syriza government would simply implement the memorandum.

Nikos was scathing about the decision of SEK and others to form Antarsya, rather than participating in Syriza as revolutionaries: "Antarsya was set up to 'protect' the members of the revolutionary left from the influence of Syriza".

Xaris from Kokkino put it differently: "Antarsya and EEK are probably right about the intentions of Tsipras. You can see this not only in terms of his decision to talk about 'renegotiating' rather than scrapping the Memorandum, but also in the way that the leadership 'forgot' about migrants and the demand for open borders in their slogans.

"But Syriza is not just about what Tsipras says. It is also about the expectations of most workers. Syriza is the only hope for most workers. If you want to win people to socialism, you have to start from where they are. We need to organise workers to support Syriza in a move to the left. The position of Antarsya is defeatist."

DEA and Kokkino agreed on the need for the unity of revolutionaries inside Syriza to fight for a socialist programme. But they also agree that if the mass movement of workers who supported Syriza as the electoral expression of their struggle against austerity is able to intervene within Syriza, that will have

a more significant leftward effect than all the members of different leftwing currents within Syriza put together.

As well as increasing the relative weight of organised revolutionaries within Syriza, DEA and Kokkino agree on the need for the creation of a mass working-class rank-and-file membership of Syriza. This is important for two reasons: firstly, to give a Syriza-led left government an alternative support for their policies than the bourgeois state; and secondly, to provide a mass impetus for the radical policies which they believe many working-class people now desire – and which the Syriza leadership is under pressure to back off from.

The process of the unification of Syriza may well, in the short term, damage the strength of revolutionary groupings in Syriza – guaranteed representation for affiliated groups on leading committees would be replaced with a one-member-one-vote system within which the strength of the revolutionary groups would be smaller.

However, in Xaris's view: "If Kokkino or DEA lose representation, that is less important than masses of ordinary people taking membership cards. In a crisis, people become more left wing than their leaders. If a lot of people organise into Syriza and vote for its leaders, that will be a good thing. Even if they initially vote for more right wing leaders, that is better than not voting. So we must organise people to take party cards".

The degree of mass participation and active engagement of the rank and file in Syriza is likely to be important. Xaris had doubts about the seriousness of the current majority in Syriza in achieving this: "one mistake was that between the two elections they held mass assemblies. But all Syriza did was to take emails – essentially saying, "we'll call you." They should have organised those in attendance of members of Syriza.

"I think that the Syriza leadership wants to give internal voting rights to new members, but slowly, maybe over an 18-month transitional period. That is a very long time for the people of Greece who want solutions right now. If they cannot do things faster in Syriza, many will look elsewhere".

However, Syriza leaders in Thessaloniki, like Miltos Ikononou, indicated to us that they were in favour of giving new members organised through the assemblies party cards immediately.

Ed also discussed with the DEA and Kokkino activists the possibility of a left government's confrontation with the bourgeois state.

It is generally accepted that a Syriza government would carry out policies which would be unacceptable to the bourgeois establishment, and which would invite a reaction. Not only DEA and Kokkino, but also more mainstream Syriza members whom we met in the Syriza office, openly compare a future Syriza government to the Allende government in Chile in 1970-3, which was eventually overthrown by a military coup.

Nikos from DEA expressed concern that the leadership faction around Tsipras did not fully appreciate the seriousness of a confrontation between a left government and the state. When asked how he thought a Syriza government would cope with non-co-operation from the state apparatus, he answered, "Tsipras thinks he can control the state apparatus with the help of the movement and of collaborators inside the civil service. In fact Syriza would have to rely on the labour movement and workers' control of services to implement its programme. For example, they would have to rely on the workers of the tax collection service rather than the heads of the service".

Nikos explained that he thought that rather than a question of convincing the Syriza leadership of the real stakes and the real

nature of a confrontation with the state, it was more a question of "building up the social forces that would organise a response". This will take time – as the Greek labour movement is, in his view, at a much lower stage of development than the Chilean labour movement of 1972-3.

Xaris of Kokkino drew another analogy – that of the "Committees for the Defence of the Revolution" which appeared in Venezuela during the right-wing coup against Chavez, and which operated public services and mobilised against the coup. (It's not clear to us how much this analogy reflects a tendency by Kokkino to take Chavez's section of the Venezuelan officer corps as a good-enough substitute for a workers' party).

DEA and Kokkino differ from much of the rest of the Greek revolutionary left on Europe. Antarsya and OKDE make their key, headline point of difference with Syriza the demand for Greece to leave the Euro – a demand which, for them, marks out the difference between reformists and revolutionaries. DEA and Kokkino disagree.

"On Europe, Antarsya's line is just a pretext", Nikos says. "A country can leave the Euro and still be capitalist. The key is not whether you are in or out of the Euro but in or out of capitalist politics".

Nikos also criticised the "proviso" that Antarsya and OKDE put on the "leave the Euro" demand – namely, that Greece's exit should be a "left exit", rather than a nationalist one. "Maybe in a few months Greece will leave the Euro, but on a nationalist basis or on the basis of an expulsion which brings chaos and worsens conditions. In that situation, what will Antarsya say to people? 'We didn't mean an exit like this?' People will not understand, or not believe them.

To the argument of the pro-exit left that the legal and constitutional institutions of the EU would create a block on executing leftwing policy, Nikos replies: "carrying out the programme of nationalising the banks and rejecting the memorandum is not a formal matter of institutions, but of class struggle. Carrying out this programme would cause a crisis in Europe" – a crisis which might be resolved in favour of the workers or in favour of the EU leaders.

"For Synaspismos", he continues, "Euro exit is undesirable. For us, it is irrelevant. The point for us is that irrespective of capitalist blackmail, a workers' government will make the bosses pay".

Kokkino make the same point – in one of their recent articles, they point out the need to "make the Greek issue a European issue" – which necessitates using the Greek crisis to make a crisis in Europe and provide an example to the struggling workers' movements of Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland.

As for the issue of the architecture of the EU being incompatible with a left government, Xaris says, "a left government would be a short episode between the present situation and a socialist revolution. It would only last a few months – it would either have to betray the people or move forward" – which in his view means that the contradiction between the EU and the left government would be resolved in struggle, and rapidly

Nikos explained that DEA was formed from two splits in the SEK. The first, in Thessaloniki in 1993, was in reaction to the SEK declaring that the fall of Stalinism would mean the disappearance of the KKE (Greek Communist Party) and all other left forces other than themselves. SEK spurned united-front work with other left groups and tendencies and took a turn to frantic self-promotion.

(This would have been a translation into Greece of a turn at the

same time by the SWP in Britain, which declared that the "downturn" of the 1980s was over, and proclaimed a new period of "volatility").

Most of SEK's Thessaloniki organisation broke away and formed a group called SEP, which considered itself to have a more measured view of the state of the left. SEP deliberately did not call itself a "party" ("komma" in Greek, as in the K of SEK). It rejected "arrogant and voluntaristic" methods, and favoured joint work with other groups.

The second split occurred in Athens in 2001, as part of the aftermath of the break in 2000 between the SWP and the ISO-USA. According to Nikos, it was about "democratic centralism and how it works - or doesn't work". SEP merged with the Athens split to form DEA.

Nikos said that DEA has "hundreds - not dozens or thousands - of members". When Ed spoke later with Xaris from Kokkino, the other Trotskyist group in Syriza, Xaris estimated: "DEA has about 300 paper members, but only about 120 active members". Kokkino, said Xaris, has about 100 members, of whom about 50 are active week-in-week-out.

Kokkino, though originating in a splinter from DEA, is no longer tied to the SWP "tradition". Nikos said that DEA "has the same theory as SEK; only, they do not put it into practice".

Back in Athens, at its Anti-Racist Festival, a now-traditional annual gathering of the left, Martin talked with many activists, including Tereza, one of the people on the stall of Kokkino. Kokkino's stall was next to DEA's, and Tereza told me that they "collaborate a lot. We are both Trotskyists, Marxists, Leninists".

Why two separate groups, then? It's a matter of different ways of approaching the movement and different ideas on how to organise, said Tereza. "We believe in recomposition - not in the idea that you can build an embryo of a revolutionary organisation and it can then grow into a revolutionary party just by recruiting more and more people".

Syriza is a "good field for recomposition". Now that Syriza is going to reorganise itself as a united party rather than a coalition, Kokkino will have to reorganise itself, and "maybe we will end up in the same platform within Syriza as DEA". "We are in Syriza", said Tereza, "because we want to be in the movement".

Tereza told me that Kokkino's last congress had concluded that Greece is in a "pre-revolutionary period". Articles by DEA have claimed that it is not pre-revolutionary, or at least not yet, but Tereza did not mention that issue as a difference between Kokkino and DEA.

Tereza shrugged at the claim by OKDE-Spartakos that Syriza is moving to the right. Syriza's commitments to rescind the memorandum and to nationalise the banks are "very radical". Syriza, she said, is often criticised for not rejecting the euro, but it is clear about "no sacrifice for the euro".

Kokkino accepts that the EU is a capitalist construction; but points out that it does not follow that getting out of the eurozone, or the EU, makes a country not capitalist. In any case, Kokkino does not believe in socialism in one country. It wants to use the solidarity of the peoples of Europe to fight the EU leadership.

Kokkino is evidently a small group. Giving me copies of Kokkino's magazine, Tereza said it is monthly "more or less, or sometimes every two months".

When, in London, we read the statements of the different revolutionary groups, Kokkino's seemed to us among the most impressive, unsectarian but also more far-reaching and radical on many political issues than the statements of groups which shun

Syriza because it is reformist.

In Kokkino's assessment of the 17 June election, published on 26 June, we found a list of ideas most of which were expressed in one way or another by other groups. But, we thought, in no other group's assessment had we found the whole complex of ideas expressed as clearly:

The forces of the revolutionary left inside and outside Syriza must converge

It is mandatory now to face the fascists with a wide network of popular self-defence groups and guards

Modern capitalist globalisation and European capitalist integration leave no room for a break with the system at the national level unless there is rapid evolution in European and international power structures... We aim for a modern European 'spring of nations'... make the 'Greek question' a European issue

The defence of immigrants is a central issue

Generalisation and nationwide networking of... popular assemblies

A plan to overturn the relationships in the labour movement, claim union leaderships, form new [first-level] unions.

Kokkino, however, has a different attitude from AWL to sharp debate and clarification on broad questions of world view.

The rather scrappy stock of books on its stall suggested that it has not replaced the SWP "tradition" by a different one. Kokkino is now an observer group in the Fourth International, the network of revolutionary socialist groups in different countries centred on activists in the NPA in France. Tereza told Martin, for example, that the question of the nature of the Stalinist states (state capitalist? deformed workers' states? or what?) is now for Kokkino one of debate rather than of defined "line".

Open debate is good, Martin said, but some socialists regard Venezuela and Cuba as "actually existing" socialism. A decision on whether that view is right or wrong is not an abstruse issue, but central to how we explain our aims and aspirations to workers every day.

"I'm just a young member of Kokkino", said Tereza. "People have to make their own liberation in their own way".

Yes: but this maxim can be interpreted in two opposite ways in relation to Venezuela and Cuba. Some use the maxim to say that Venezuela and Cuba have chosen their own ways to socialism, and so no-one should criticise. We would use it to say that the free organisation of the working class, independent of and inevitably in important senses against Chavez and Castro, is fundamental.

Tereza was clear that Venezuela and Cuba are not socialist, but beyond that she wasn't sure.

Back in London, we talked with Giorgos Galanis, who was active in Kokkino in Greece and still keeps contact, but has been in England for the last six years, active with Socialist Resistance.

He told us a bit about the history of Kokkino.

It originated in a split from DEA about the perspectives of their work in Syriza. The Kokkino people saw it as a long-term activity aimed at "recomposition" of the left and the creation of a "broad party" to the left of social democracy.

The DEA majority, said Giorgos, saw it more as a tactical gambit. Though (he said) they didn't use the term, they saw Syriza somewhat in terms of the SWP's concept of "a united front of a special type".

Despite the differences, said Giorgos, there would not have been a split but for the fact that DEA maintains a similar regime to the SWP, allowing opposition groupings to operate and express themselves collectively only in strictly-delimited pre-conference periods.

The differences were sharpened by the 2004 Euro-elections, in which Syriza as such did not stand. Synaspismos, the major component of Syriza, stood in its own name. It seemed a real possibility that Syriza as such would just fade away.

DEA distanced itself a bit from Syriza, or at least had a "wait and see" attitude. Kokkino threw itself into agitating for the revitalisation of Syriza.

A revitalisation happened, helped by a swing to the left in Synaspismos and a good result for a list headed by Alexis Tsipras in the Athens city elections in 2006.

Giorgos said that Kokkino has had some impact in the Greek left recently beyond its size, pioneering the slogans for "no sacrifice for the euro" and a united left government.

Early on Kokkino drew in other activists from origins other than DEA. Manifesto, a group which had split from OKDE-Spartakos, joined right at the start, and helped push Kokkino towards seeking and getting observer status with the "Fourth International" network centred round the LCR/ NPA in France.

Other activists who have joined Kokkino include a group who were formerly in the Greek group linked to Socialist Appeal in Britain.

The "broad parties to the left of social democracy" orientation favoured by the Fourth International in recent times has, in AWL's view, many drawbacks.

It tends to lead to a blurring of political message. In Rifondazione in Italy, for example, [the FI group Sinistra Critica seemed for a long while to be more advisers to the leadership than an independent force](#). In Britain it led to Socialist Resistance joining Respect. In France it led to the LCR often talking as if nothing much could be done until some "broad" force joined the LCR to produce the promised "broad" party.

The orientation could also, paradoxically, lead to a sectarianism towards the base of social-democratic parties, since the political definition of the desired "broad" party was made negative - "to the left of social democracy" - rather than positive.

All that said, Kokkino's statements do not indicate that sort of political blurring. On important issues they are sharper than statements from groups outside Syriza.

Judging from DEA's recent statements, the evolution of Syriza in recent years may have narrowed the differences in practice between DEA and Kokkino.

"We must end this Memorandum"

Near the middle of Thessaloniki, and overlooking the ruins of the city's old Roman forum, the Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre is housed in a typical, somewhat run-down, multistorey concrete block building.

On the walls outside, across the windows of the shuttered shop next door, and on a noticeboard inside the centre, are plastered political posters from the left. As well as the main trade union offices, there is also a door marked for PAME, the union association linked to the Communist Party (KKE).

As we waited for union officials to arrive, Elena Apostolidou, secretary to the president of the Trade Union Centre, told us that no-one in the trade union centre has been paid their wages for a couple of months now. Her tiny office will be very hot as the 35°C day wears on, but to the idea of getting a fan she says that there are big problems with money.

Costas, a leader of the Thessaloniki water company workers, later explains to us that the Trade Union Centre building, its utility bills, and the wages of the people working there, used to be paid by the government. For many months now, the government has stopped paying, as it has stopped paying many suppliers.

At first the Trade Union Centre tapped funds from the "first level" unions (a term Costas will explain), but now that money has run out too, and for two months no-one has been paid. "The Government says it's a problem that will be solved, but it's being going on for too many months now".

Costas also asks us a question. Is Thessaloniki as we expected? One of us replies that what we have been told by many people indicates that there is great trouble and suffering behind closed doors, from unemployment and poverty.

Yes, replies Costas. Things look all right in the city centre. (There are some shuttered shops and cafés, but nothing dramatic. The remaining cafés still have people sipping iced coffee through straws, playing backgammon, and chatting).

But it is different further out. "People are sleeping in doorways, and sorting through garbage heaps to find something to eat. That didn't happen before".

Costas believes that the trade unions in other countries "must inform people that the problem with have in Greece is a problem will have in every country. It is a system problem. When they are done with us, and with Spain and Italy, they will go on to others, maybe France.

"We have to change the rules where everything is privatised and everything goes to a few people".

Costas has come to tell us about the campaign against privatisation of the Thessaloniki Water Company, which started before the crisis.

In the early 2000s, 39% of the Athens Water Company was sold off, and 25% of the Thessaloniki Water Company. That means, for a start, that water workers have three different wage agreements: one each for Athens and Thessaloniki, and one for the rest of the country. The workforce has decreased, the average age of the workers remaining is high, and a lot of job knowledge has been lost.

All wages of public employees have been cut 35%, and that includes the water workers. Now the government wants to complete the sell-off. It said it would start selling last year, but hasn't yet.

"You know in Britain what water privatisation means", Costas tells us. "And in other countries, not to mention South America. It will not just be bad for the workers. The price of water will rise, and no investment will be done".

Costas's union has run a campaign in Thessaloniki called Initiative 136. The goal, he says, is to let people know what is

happening, and gather money so that the people themselves can buy the company, which makes a profit.

Costas also tells us about the structure of the Greek unions. "First level" unions cover a workplace, or a firm, or trade, within an area. The water company, for example, has its own single "first level" union, uniting all trades and grades. 220 workers out of 370 are in the union. Most workers join strikes when they are called, "but I think everywhere there are a few who won't".

Unions can then choose to be represented at the "second level" in a local Trade Union Centre like Thessaloniki's - there are 15 centres across Greece - or in a trade federation. The "third level" is that of the union confederation.

The Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre is the oldest in Greece. It started (under a different name) in 1912, when Thessaloniki was still ruled by the Ottoman Empire.

A board near the entrance of the Trade Union Centre records its successive presidents since 1974. Why since 1974? Because since then - that is, since the end of the 1967-74 military dictatorship - the presidents have been elected, every three years.

The next election for Trade Union Centre president is in November 2012. First level unions elect their representatives every two or three years. All the elections are by postal vote.

The Trade Union Centre covers 250 "first level" unions, with a total of 100,000 members. The smallest of those unions has 22 members; the biggest, the local bus workers', almost 3000.

Panagiotis Tsaraboulidis, president of the trade union centre of Thessaloniki, gave us his picture of the situation.

"Everyone in government tells us that they don't want the [EU/ECB/IMF] Memorandum, but we have to go on this road. But we must end this Memorandum if we want work in this country".

He sees long-term problems. "We have had a fake economy. We import everything. All the factories have closed because businesses went out of the country, and here in Greece everyone wanted to open their own little business, a café, a shop".

There is officially 27% unemployment in Thessaloniki, and 32% in the region.

"Building the self-organisation of the movement"

For a Greek Trotskyist aware of her or his movement's history, the names OKDE [Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece] and *Ergatiki Pali* [Workers' Struggle] shine bright.

They were used by the foremost historical figure of Greek Trotskyism - Pandelis Pouliopoulos, first general secretary of the Communist Party of Greece, and a leader in the movement until killed by Italian occupation troops in 1943 - and again by the reassembled Trotskyist movement after World War Two.

Other historic names, also still adapted today, are *Spartakos* and *Neo Xekinima*, journals published by Pouliopoulos.

The current holder of the great names OKDE and *Ergatiki Pali* is

an organisation overwhelmingly of young comrades, with the oddity among Greek left groups of being stronger in Thessaloniki, Greece's second city, than in Athens. It publishes *Ergatiki Pali* as a monthly newspaper, and plans to make it fortnightly from January 2013.

In its current form OKDE originates from a division, a few years back, among Greek activists affiliated to the Fourth International, the network centred round activists in the NPA in France. The comrades who would form the current OKDE noted such things as the participation of members of the Brazilian group of the Fourth International in the bourgeois government led by the Workers' Party in Brazil, and argued that the Fourth International was abandoning Trotskyist clarity for a mess of broad-leftism.

OKDE is a group mainly of young members, conscious of and committed to a historic tradition, but obliged to work out its policy in a stormy social crisis step-by-step without guidance from international comrades long recognised as senior and authoritative.

The official Fourth International group in Greece now is OKDE-Spartakos, publishing the journal Spartakos, and participating in the Antarsya coalition.

When we asked Sofia, an OKDE leader in Athens, about the growth of the different left groups in Greece, she replied: "Member" does not mean the same thing in all the groups. In OKDE every member has a lot of duties. It is not just a question of numbers, but also of quality..."

On the question of the possibilities of unity of the Trotskyists, she said:

"A lot of people say they are Trotskyists, but they aren't. Some Trotskyists do not focus on self-organisation of the working class. They are just propagandists".

Other left groups in Greece tend to admit, at least tacitly, that OKDE is a higher-voltage outfit than the rest.

Despite its separation from the Fourth International, OKDE still values and circulates the writings of Ernest Mandel, who for decades was the chief theorist of the current represented today by the core of the NPA. Showing us OKDE's stall at the 6-8 July Anti-Racist Festival in Athens - a stall markedly better stocked than those of other left groups nearby - Sofia proudly points to Greek translations of works by Mandel as well as by Trotsky, and explains that those writings of Mandel and the writings of Pouliopoulos form a foundation for OKDE's work.

Before going to Athens, we met Spiros, a leader of OKDE in Thessaloniki.

In Thessaloniki, OKDE has a clubhouse ("Iskra"), a large, smart-looking room with space for meetings, a bar for food and drink, and storage spaces. Spiros explains that the rent is not expensive, and OKDE can cover the expenses, more or less, by the revenue from food and drink sales.

Later, we will meet comrades from the New Left Current (NAR, the biggest subgroup of Antarsya) in a cafe owned by a NAR member which is their unofficial meeting place. In Thessaloniki there is also a "Syriza cafe", and a cafe run by an anarchist which is the gathering-point for many anarchists.

When we arrive at the clubhouse, half a dozen young people are sitting around, chatting. Soon they start the play-reading they have come for. It is not an OKDE enterprise: they just find "Iskra" a convenient and friendly place to meet.

When Spiros has arrived, and we go outside to sit round a table

on the pavement and talk, we hear inside a showing of Gillo Pontecorvo's film on the Algerian independence struggle, "Battle of Algiers". The showing has been organised by the OKDE youth, and is followed by a short discussion on the political issues in the film.

Pictures on the wall include one (not large) of Che Guevara. In OKDE's Athens office - a workday affair in a down-market office building, though one with four sizeable rooms - a picture of Pantelis Pouliopoulos has pride of place.

Spiros tells us: "OKDE contested the election for the first time on 6 May. We campaigned across areas touching around 70% of Greece's population. It gave us an opportunity to reach more people.

"We got about 2000 votes. It could be better, but we drew in new people for the first time. Our comrades had the chance to draw in members of their families, and so on, to do some little thing to support us.

"In the second election, in June, our main job was to build on that campaign for the first election.

"The long election period in Greece meant that many things were put on hold. But the tasks remain the same: building the self-organisation of the movement, even if there is a left government.

"There are a lot of battles for survival - the potato movement - the volunteer health clinics.

"Our campaign in the election was not about how you should vote. In fact we supported a blank vote in the June election, but we did not push for it. We did not argue with people who wanted to vote for Syriza about that. Our campaign was about self-organisation.

"In May we needed to participate in order to make OKDE's programme known". Because that election was announced long in advance, "we could start the campaign early. EEK proposed a common campaign to us, but we wanted to make OKDE known.

"In the June election there was a dichotomy, New Democracy or Syriza, so we would have had a worse result. Also, the election campaign was expensive. Altogether we paid out about 40,000 euros in compulsory expenses, and another 15,000 euros for leaflets and so on, which is a lot for an organisation of around 90 members.

"Now our focus is on recruitment, especially in cities where we have new contacts. We are refocussing on trade union activity.

"We have a campaign here about a bakery in Thessaloniki where the workers are on strike for unpaid wages. We are active in campaigns around new contracts in telecom in Athens. We are trying to organise committees in neighbourhoods, and anti-fascist activity".

We talked with Spiros about the various forms of neighbourhood assemblies and committees. What he said about that is in another article, where we pull together the different accounts on that question we were given by different people.

We asked Spiros next about the growth of the left. "It is not very linear", he said. OKDE has grown, he said, but "no-one has doubled".

There is "a bigger layer of a new vanguard in the movement, but not a real process of regroupment". In the 6 May elections, the far left got its best results ever, with 1.2% for Antarsya. (This went down to 0.3% on 17 June).

The "Don't Pay Movement" - led, said Spiros, by a split from EEK - got a similar result to Antarsya (0.9%). EEK had had two

splits in the run-up to the poll, but still got more votes than it had done in 2009 (0.10% in May 2012, 0.07% in 2009).

In Thessaloniki, said Spiros, the biggest group on the far left is NAR, the New Left Current, a subgroup of Antarsya. It is very loose, he said, with its activity sporadic. It comes from a split from KKE, but is neither Maoist, nor Stalinist, nor Trotskyist, but instead "centrist", disavowing all defined political traditions.

SEK, the group linked to the SWP in Britain, "is active, but has a rapid turnover of members, and makes little impact. It is not involved much in the unions".

One of Greece's numerous Maoist groups, KKE-ML, has its main base in Thessaloniki, and is comparable in size in the city to OKDE.

"More people know about the Trotskyist organisations now. The Maoist groups have survived, but you can't say they are growing". Trotskyist regroupment? "There has been some discussion, but to have real discussions you have to have common activity, and there is not much of that".

In the neighbourhood committee in Kalimaria, said Spiros, Synaspismos and OKDE both have a presence. In west Thessaloniki, OKDE is the only defined political group present, though the people in the assembly are open-minded and go to other political meetings too.

OKDE's immediate programme, said Spiros, is:

1. Stop paying the debt - as a matter of survival.
2. Cut links with the EU and the eurozone. "It is a question of controlling our own currency. At present the bankers control the currency. There is no way of having the euro without having the [cuts] Memorandum".
3. Rebuild our economy and our society - socialisation of the banks and the main industries under workers' control.
4. We need a constituent assembly, formed through neighbourhood popular assemblies, to create a new way of governing ourselves.
5. Better self-organisation. More confidence in the movement. Build a revolutionary force.

We questioned the "Constituent Assembly" idea. For the Bolsheviks and for Trotsky, the slogan of a "Constituent Assembly" was modelled on the experience of the Constituent Assembly in the French Revolution, 1789 to September 1791.

A constituent assembly is simply a parliament with the remit of writing a new constitution. The demand for it is essentially a matter of giving the sharpest formulation to the demand for parliamentary democracy in countries where no such thing yet exists.

Trotsky wrote that it was for countries where "the struggle for the most elementary achievements of national independence and bourgeois democracy is combined with the socialist struggle against world imperialism...

"It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India.

"This slogan must be indissolubly tied up with the problem of national liberation and agrarian reform. As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers..."

To advance a central slogan of Constituent Assembly for Greece,

a country with a long parliamentary history, and apparently as a sort of surrogate expression of "workers' government", is surely to muddle things up.

Spiros replied that "the Constituent Assembly idea came from the squares movement" [of June-July 2011]. He noted that the Bolsheviks had also used the demand "Constituent Assembly", and was unconvinced by our argument that the Bolshevik usage was premised on the assessment that the conditions of Tsarist Russia made even bourgeois parliamentary democracy a revolutionary demand.

"The Constituent Assembly is a very tactical issue", said Spiros. "Our strategy is to build the power of the movement. The committees and assemblies in the neighbourhoods are the biggest base for dual power. We try to get bigger and better assemblies, and to find ways for people to self-manage their affairs.

"It is not easy to pose the question now in assemblies about what to do about the police and the army. The demand for a Constituent Assembly can open up space for that". After the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, noted Spiros, an assembly was called only to amend the constitution [that is, the pre-dictatorship 1952 constitution, which was restored by decree], not to write a new one.

"The important thing is not how to get the Constituent Assembly, but the idea that the working-class people of Greece should decide how to run the society and the economy. We are trying to bridge a gap between the current development of the movement and soviets".

We asked about the fascist Golden Dawn movement: the record of our discussion on that is in another article.

When we asked Spiros about what issues separate OKDE from other left groups, he started by discussing assessments of the 17 June election.

"We see the result as a big rise of the vote for the left. The left vote is now comparable to the Italian Communist Party's vote at its high point, or Allende's in 1970.

"Also, people under 55 vote Syriza, while New Democracy has a big majority among those over 55. Workers vote left. The pattern is different from all other elections since 1974.

"The capitalist class had a sort of contract with Greek society - with the small bourgeoisie and public-sector workers and the better-paid workers in the private sector. All politics developed within that framework.

"Now you see a class vote. KKE and Antarsya say the 17 June result is a defeat because of the EU issue, even though the pro-EU Syriza said that voting for them was a vote against the EU bureaucracy.

"There is an issue about the unions. Over the next six months or one year Pasok will lose a lot of union leadership positions in elections. The biggest gains will be for the far left - more for a broad spectrum of activists than for the organised groups.

"In the unions you can't really separate Syriza and the far left. They work together. Sometimes rank-and-file Syriza activists in the unions are more left-wing than rank-and-file Antarsya activists. Since the 1970s there has been a big current of unorganised broadly far-left activists in Greece, often ex-student activists.

"In the 1980s or 90s we might have had a big revolutionary regroupment, but European Marxism today has big problems. It is not so easy".

If OKDE analysed the Syriza vote in the 17 June election as a class vote and a big turn to the left, why then did OKDE favour a blank vote?

"We didn't have a policy of a blank vote. We had a policy for what the movement should do" (i.e. for self-organisation, etc.)

"We criticised what Syriza was doing, and said if it took a stronger position it would get a better vote. But we did not open an argument with people who wanted to vote Syriza.

"I wouldn't vote for Antarsya because it is just an election coalition. Outside elections, mainly, each group in Antarsya does its own separate activity".

New Left Current activists whom we spoke to later would tell us that most activity is of Antarsya as a whole, rather than of the subgroups within it, but Spiros continued: "Antarsya were against the squares movement [of June-July 2011].

"They said party literature was not allowed in the squares. Yes, but you could speak. They said that the extreme right was also there in the squares. Yes, but they were soon gone.

"Not all the people in the squares were left-wing, but you can't define new movements with old prescriptions. Lots of ruined shopkeepers were there in the squares, but they came as working people, not as advocates of an alliance of the working class with the petty bourgeoisie as KKE might do.

"Antarsya says its programme is a transitional programme. Ok, they call for socialisation of the banks and big industries, but sometimes they leave out 'under workers' control'.

"They are very fond of KKE". (In the sense, we think, that, for example, Antarsya assessed the 17 June election result as a setback because of the big decline in the KKE vote).

"I think that is because of Antarsya's own lack of confidence. I don't think KKE losing half its vote is a defeat for the working class, as Antarsya thinks it is".

We concluded by arguing about OKDE's demand for Greek exit from the eurozone and EU, which seemed to us a diversion.

Spiros gave no credence to the arguments of economists like Theodore Mariolis, Stergios Skaperdas, and Costas Lapavistas, who argue that a return to the drachma could enable Greece to regain international competitiveness and thus export its way out of economic crisis.

"Greece does not have exports big enough to boost them by devaluation" (i.e. by shifting to have its domestic costs measured in drachmas which will equate to progressively fewer euros).

"But, as Europeans, we have to get rid of the EU treaties.

"The EU constitution is about imposing neo-liberalism in Europe. The euro currency is about a treaty".

Spiros sidestepped from this "EU-is-capitalist" argument into one about relations between Germany and Greece. "Germany has an excess of imports over exports outside the EU, and lives by exporting more to the EU than it imports". But he then returned to the "EU-is-capitalist" argument.

"The point is to deal a blow to the European capitalist system, not to create an island of socialism.

"With an exit, there would be big problems for six months or so, but three years of memorandums means doubled unemployment and poverty.

"The demand for exit goes hand in hand with the demand for the socialist united states of Europe".

"To build a revolutionary Marxist current in a united workers' movement"

In Athens, from Syntagma Square in the city centre, Martin Thomas went to the Anti-Racist Festival, a now-traditional annual gathering of the left in a park further from the centre.

When he arrived at 7pm - a bit later than the time he'd promised to activists he was meeting, because earlier discussions had run a bit late - the festival seemed scanty, with many stalls not yet set up and only a few people around. He left at 12:30am because the comrade (from OKDE) putting him up overnight and offering a lift on his motorbike was leaving. (Motorbikes are the most common form of transport for not-very-well-off Greeks, although public transport in Thessaloniki and Athens is good. Greece has the highest rate of road-traffic deaths in Europe outside some of the ex-Stalinist states, more than three times the EU's lowest rates in Sweden and the UK).

By 12:30am others were leaving too, but the event was near its peak. Many thousands were gathered round the music stage, and for the most part much younger than the crowds that left-wing events in Britain usually get. Around each of the stalls in the corner of the park allocated to the revolutionary socialist organisations were gathered half a dozen or a dozen people (again, mostly young, except maybe at the OKDE-Spartakos stall), eating, drinking, and chatting. The Greek word equivalent to the English "comrade" is "syntrophos", literally, one who eats together.

The stall of the Trotskyist organisation OKDE (to be distinguished from OKDE-Spartakos) had a better display of books than the others, and the OKDE members were alert and energetic. At one point they fanned out across the festival to collect money for an industrial dispute which OKDE is working round, at Hatzis bakery. Distracted from time to time by tasks of organising the stall, or by mobile phone calls, an OKDE organiser, Sofia Theodoropoulou, spoke to Martin Thomas.

She said:

There is no major change in our activities before and after the election. The major issue is what the result of the election means, and how we explain it.

We interpret the electoral result as a consequence of the two years of consecutive social battles in workplaces and neighbourhoods and in the city squares.

Huge social and political movements and changes have taken place in the Greek working class and youth. All those changes have been expressed in the election result.

It is a huge turn to the left. It means that the majority of Greek society will wage even tougher fights in the months to come.

The Syriza result expresses the turn to the left. Yet it doesn't mean that the masses are dedicated to the programme of Syriza or to reformism. People are looking for answers.

The left turn means more power for the movement, more people ready to be mobilised, more people politically interested in several different programmes and answers and open to revolutionary answers even if they voted for a reformist party like Syriza.

As regards the bourgeois parties, the 17 June result is a little bit different from 6 May, and has made it possible for New Democracy to build a bourgeois coalition government. But New Democracy did not attract new forces. It just gathered together the support of several smaller bourgeois pro-memorandum parties that had stood separately on 6 May.

With Syriza, it was not just that they took support transferred from Antarsya or other groups of the far left. They also gained forces from other parties.

Despite the fact that the whole Greek, European, and global bourgeois class - from Obama to the Chinese leaders - tried to blackmail the Greek working class not to vote for the anti-memorandum programme, Syriza managed not only to assemble the previous voters of the left on 6 May but also to increase the left percentage.

The Greek working class has understood that the blackmail - if you say no to the memorandum, you say no to the European Union, and then you will be bankrupt - is not true. They understand that bankruptcy is what is happening right here and right now in our everyday lives. They do not accept the blackmail.

Politically, the Greek working class is becoming more mature. It is beginning to put into question what the European Union is, and what the European Union programme stands for. Although Syriza defends the EU as a totality, still, as far as working-class voters are concerned, we understand that they have started putting the euro and the European Union into question.

Many people say that the issue is to save our lives, our jobs, our standards of living, our schools, our hospitals, and that comes first. The European Union and the euro come second. If the European Union and the euro cannot guarantee those things, they are worthless for us. They understand that if we say no to the memorandum, then most likely we will be expelled from the EU, and still they stand for that no.

Our effort is to build a revolutionary Marxist party, which means to strengthen a revolutionary Marxist current in a united workers' movement.

We do not build separate trade unions. We stand for united trade unions. We stand for united committees in neighbourhoods, united strikes and marches, but in that united movement we build a strong current of revolutionary Marxists.

We spend a lot of our time and effort on the self-organisation of the workers' movement and the youth. We build new trade unions where there are no unions, for example in most of the private sector. We reform trade unions where they have become dormant due to social-democratic or reformist leadership.

We build committees in the neighbourhoods under the slogan "Cancel the Debt! Reject the Memorandum!", and with the duty to intervene wherever there are social problems arising at local level from the memorandum, for example closing a school or a hospital.

We also work for the self-organisation of the unemployed. We intervene for the right for free public transport and so on.

On the ideological and political level, we have our publications. Our paper is monthly and will be fortnightly from January 2013. We have published many books and pamphlets. And we organise Marxist schools.

OKDE has grown in the last six months by 50%, and in the last year and a half it has doubled. Everyone has grown, of course!

Antarsya, let's say? Of course they have strengthened

themselves. It is the social situation. But they have not managed themselves to strengthen themselves in a *significant* way because of the problems of their policy.

In the unions, first of all we form trade unions [i.e. first-level unions, organisations in workplaces or firms]. In the private sector, 90% of workers are not organised.

For example, I work in Vodafone, a major firm with 2500 workers. There was no union at all. One was started from scratch. Now there are 550 members. [See http://www.pasevodafone.gr/index_en.php].

The second thing to do is inform our workmates, with assemblies, with local meetings, and so on, about their rights and the political situation. Every second week we have an assembly or a local meeting.

When we have incidents of lay-offs, we start mobilising our workmates, which means calling an assembly, deciding to have a strike, closing the firm during the strike, distributing leaflets to workmates but also in society, on the streets and so on. And we have managed to stop some layoffs. We have got a collective contract, which did not exist before.

The main industrial areas in which we are active in Athens are mobile telecommunications, a metalworking factory, Carrefour supermarkets, education (public and private). Of course we are also active with the unemployed.

In some union elections in recent months, Pasok have not even managed to put up candidates. I think more or less every left force can gain influence in the coming union elections. Ordinary workers who up to now were influenced by Pasok in the unions will now, even though they vote for Syriza, be open to new political ideas, programmes, and solutions.

Of course, Syriza will gain. Any left force which has an intervention in the working class and the trade unions will gain.

If we as revolutionary Marxists prove ourselves able to apply our programme in practice, we can gain the leadership of more trade unions than we have now.

There are a lot of new unions. Our organisation alone has built, in the last years, five or six new unions. In Athens there are maybe 30 new trade unions, in several sectors.

But the federation [of unions] in Athens is almost dead. Since we had our elections last October, and elected our representatives [from the first-level unions] to the Athens federation, we have been calling for a meeting of the federation, but there has been no meeting.

There isn't a lot going on at the level. The only thing is that when the movement pushes them very hard, they call a strike. They don't organise for the strike, or prepare the strike.

On the initiative of the representatives of the first-level unions themselves, without any help from the federation, if in Athens for example we have a big strike, we call all the first-level trade unions for a common meeting, or at least all with whom we have contact. This is informal.

It is not constant. It happens whenever there is an open front - a certain problem, a certain fight, as a basis. In the last year I have participated in about seven meetings of that sort. About ten to twelve trade unions participate. About thirty people. It depends. In large part the same people each time. People from Syriza, anarchists, Antarsya...

To call a strike in our firm, we have an assembly of the trade union which decides on the strike. Then we send a formal notice to the bosses. The decision depends only on the vote in the firm.

If it's a strike over several different unions, then only the federation can decide.

In Vodafone, we have different workplaces. But the assembly is an assembly of all the workers in the firm. The union pays the money for workers from outside Athens to travel to take part in the assembly if they want to. We call the assemblies at times when workers can participate.

We always prepare our assemblies. Two weeks before we go to every town where there are Vodafone workers, and we go through the offices distributing trade-union leaflets. We organise local discussions - five people here, five people there.

We do local assemblies, in Thessaloniki, for example. And then we go to the final common assembly which decides on a strike.

When we had a strike a few weeks ago for the collective contract, we had two or three different assemblies and 30 or 40 local discussions. About 200 to 250 workers participated in those meetings. The final assembly had about 50 or 60 workers. Although there may be few members in the final assembly, many more workers participate in the discussion.

It's not like that in all unions. Similar work is done in about ten trade unions in Athens, I think.

But strikes in education - they are not organised at all. The federation calls for a strike, and anyone who has the political sense tries to go from school to school to discuss it, but it is not organised centrally.

We have picket lines in every strike. Most unions have picket lines.

The strike covers all the workers in the firm, whether they are union members or not. Over the last two or three years, we have almost never had incidents on the picket lines of workers trying to go in.

In education, I think there are never picket lines. In big strikes, 80% will go on strike. In others, less.

Quit the EU? Diversion, or necessary step?

At the Anti-Racist Festival in Athens on 7 July 2012, Martin Thomas discussed the question of the European Union with Sofia Theodoropoulou from OKDE.

M. I understand that the European Union and the eurozone are capitalist institutions. But all the member states are capitalist too. They are no less capitalist if they separate off.

S. The European Union and the euro are the major strategy of capital nowadays. You have to demolish this European Union if you want to open the way for the social revolution in your own country. We do not say that our duty is done if Greece is out of the European Union. We can do nothing of our socialist duty within the European Union.

M. Why not?

S. Because the European Union is the main strategy of capital. We have at the same time to fight against the European Union, which is a capitalistic, imperialistic, thing of the European

bourgeois class, and at the same time fight against our own bourgeois class in our own country, to open the way to the social revolution. We have to get out of the European Union. If we manage that as a Greek movement, we will have much more confidence and much more power to fight also against our own bourgeois class.

M. The treaties and the policies of the European Union represent the consensus of the leading capitalist classes of Europe. In that sense, they come together and express their common strategy. But it is not that there is a strategy which comes from the European Union down to the bourgeois states. The different bourgeois states are the main material forces behind the capitalist strategies. The European Commission is a small factor by comparison.

S. In general, the European bourgeois class has a main strategy for itself these days which is called "European Union" and "euro". You have to defeat it in order to open the socialist way in your own country.

M. The nearest we've been to a socialist revolution in Europe in the last decades was in France in May-June 1968. The obstacles that the French working class faced to making a revolution were not the European Union, or the European Economic Community as it was called then. The problem was the French state, the French army, NATO... If in the course of the general strike, someone had said that the strike should demand that France withdraw from the European Economic Community, it would have been a complete diversion.

S. Can a general strike in your own country win against neoliberal policy if it doesn't confront the European Union policy of neoliberalism? It is not possible.

M. That means you need to generalise the struggle, and spread it to working classes across Europe. It doesn't mean you need that particular country to separate off. That country separating off from the European Union doesn't necessarily mean any positive change.

S. Really? No change if Greece gets out of the European Union? I don't think you understand the consciousness of the working class at all. We strongly believe that the Greek working class, if it manages to build a movement against the European Union, and manages to get out of the European Union, it will be so strong and confident that it will be much more easy to get rid of Samaras and the local capitalists. I am not talking about Greece being expelled when they want to expel us. I am talking about the movement within our country winning withdrawal from the European Union on its own conditions and its own terms. That will demolish the Greek bourgeois class.

M. Iceland is not in the European Union. Norway is not in the European Union. Switzerland is not in the European Union. Their bourgeoisies are not defeated.

S. If you manage to win this with the movement, you will have opened a way to get rid of the local bourgeois class. It is not sure that you will win, but things will be much better. A working-class movement that manages to force getting out of the European Union will be so strong that it will be able also to make the socialist revolution in Greece, under the leadership of a revolutionary party in Greece.

M. What about the sections of the Greek bourgeoisie that are in favour of leaving the European Union?

S. It is a pity you don't understand. This is a time when major sections of the Greek working class are coming to understand it. The voters against the memorandum understand that if we say no to the memorandum, that means no to the European Union. Still,

they vote for no to the memorandum. They have come to understand, more or less, that there is a way out of the European Union, and it is better.

M. Why then did they vote for Syriza, which is against quitting the European Union, and why didn't they vote for Antarsya, which was the big left-wing force which had as its priority getting Greece out of the European Union?

S. Three years ago we had the 80% of the Greek people voting for Pasok and New Democracy. Their first step is to vote for Syriza, not for the left. Their second step will be strengthening the anti-capitalist revolutionary left, if that left proves itself competent. You cannot expect to have 80% of the Greek people who voted for Pasok and ND three years ago to shift all at once to the far left.

M. But Antarsya's vote went down, not up.

S. This is the first step the masses take away from the bourgeois parties...

M. But also away from Antarsya.

S. The first level of consciousness is turning to the left. Our duty is to help with the second step.

M. It is one thing to reject a line of staying in the European Union at all costs. We reject that because, although it would be preferable for the working-class struggle to develop evenly across Europe, it would be wrong for the workers of any one country to wait for the others. Given the level of integration in Europe, a socialist revolution in one country in Europe will not succeed unless it spreads to others soon. There is no country in Europe which is like Russia in 1917. Every country is more highly integrated, smaller, with fewer natural resources. It may be that a workers' government in one country in the EU is not able to get the solidarity in time, and ends up having to have its own currency and being expelled from the European Union. But why would we positively want that country to be separated off? Greater integration also makes it easier for struggles to spread. For a country to have its own currency is not a particularly working-class or socialist thing.

S. I disagree. The financial situation of Greek capitalism before the European Union was much better than the situation we have now. We used to have industry, capitalist industry. There is nothing left. We used to have an agricultural economy. There is nothing left.

"We should start a socialist programme"

Conversation with an activist from Xekinima

Reading what the Greek left said, as best we could from material they translated themselves or supplied to English-language co-thinkers, and from online translation services, we had found the output of Xekinima, the Greek group linked to the Socialist Party in England, reasonable and plausible.

Yet Xekinima proved to be the most difficult group to get discussion with. We did not try with SEK, the Greek group linked with the SWP, reasoning that an account of its ideas and activities is available in translation via the SWP, we can fill in

the gaps from knowledge of how the SWP generally runs its international offshoots, and anyway they would probably be unresponsive.

Every other group was ready to discuss. When we phoned the contact we had for Xekinima in Thessaloniki, he told us curtly that he would have no time to talk.

Eventually we made contact through the generous help of Nikos Anastasiadis of DEA, and met Giannis Vogiatzis of Xekinima near the Venizelos statue in central Thessaloniki.

We found a cafe to sit at, and Giannis told us that he is the fourth or fifth oldest member of Xekinima. An affable, unpretentious character, he is 52 years old, and has been a Xekinima member since 1988.

Xekinima is "mainly a youth organisation". Giannis was first politically active in Pasok, and joined Xekinima thanks to the influence of his younger brother, who joined Xekinima in 1986. Apart from some years as a student in Patra, Giannis has lived in Thessaloniki all his life. He is unemployed, and has been unemployed, apart from some short-term contracts, for some years.

"Xekinima became part of Syriza in 2008", he told us. At that time Syriza was running at up to 17% in the polls, but in the end, in the 2009 election, it got only 4.5%.

After a while Xekinima came to the conclusion that "people didn't believe in Syriza", and separated from it "in a friendly way". The big Syriza result in May 2012 "surprised both Syriza and Xekinima".

"Now Syriza has all the chances to become the first left government ever in Greece. Xekinima, and a serious part of Syriza, want to be not a responsible opposition to the current government but a socialist opposition.

"We might think of re-entering Syriza". When we asked Giannis further about this, he replied: "might, in capitals and underlined". But, yes, Xekinima had worked in the Syriza committees in the June 2012 election, and Syriza had distributed a Xekinima leaflet. "We are friendly with Syriza". "If the left of Syriza calls on us to re-enter, I don't think we'd have a serious excuse for not doing that".

"We don't expect the current government to last. There could be the next election before Christmas, and then a left government.

"In the next election, Pasok and Democratic Left could go together. Both Pasok and Democratic Left are trying to save themselves by not nominating their leading people as ministers in this government.

"KKE is the oldest and strongest left party in Greece, but it lost 50% of its vote between May and June. KKE said Syriza could have problems with international capitalism and not win, and people said: so what? Even if it doesn't win, it's making an effort.

"There was a big movement in mid 2011 of hostility to all parties. Lots of people didn't vote in May. That is why Syriza couldn't win. Then in June you had a polarised situation".

Syriza "started by saying: reject the memorandum. Then you hear some Syriza leaders saying: renegotiate the memorandum". Still, Syriza "was the main winner".

What of Xekinima's own activity? "Xekinima is a small group. We exist in four areas. We do our best. The name Xekinima is well-known, a brand name since 1975.

"We have some high-school students and unemployed. We try to turn to the working class too, not so much in Thessaloniki as in

Athens, especially among health workers, bus workers, and press workers".

We got the impression that the main activity of Xekinima is to sell its paper. The Greek left is not big on public paper-selling - *Rizospastis*, *Avgi*, *Prin* etc. circulate through kiosks and shops - and the main exceptions are SEK and Xekinima, which have "transplanted" habits of paper-selling from Britain.

Euro or drachma? "All the conservative part of society said that when Syriza rejects the memorandum, Greece will be thrown out of the euro. People didn't understand that in fact it is difficult for a country to be thrown out of the euro. All the EU could do is not give Greece money to pay the bondholders.

"We believe that the problem of Greece is an international problem. We need to bring in as many as possible of the European countries.

"This has been shown up in a clear way. Spain, Italy, Cyprus are joining us.

"We in Xekinima don't have leaving the euro as a primary goal. Either euro or drachma, the problem will remain".

Then why does the Socialist Party in England, with which Xekinima is linked, campaign as it did in the Euro-elections of 2009 under the banner "No2EU"?

"Britain is not a member of the euro area. That is why the Britain campaign could be different".

Giannis's answer makes no sense to us, but we press on.

"We do not say no to the euro. When in 2001 Simitis took us into the euro, the Greek people wanted to stay with the drachma. Prices went up very sharply with the currency change. Now opinion has changed.

"Syriza does not have a clear answer. About 92% of the bailout money goes to bondholders, only about 8% to public needs.

"Even before there is a crisis over euro membership, we should start a socialist programme: nationalise the banks, and stop money going out of Greece.

"The Greek government could print new money in limited amounts to cover the missing 8% for public needs. Oil imports could be difficult. The drachma could be very cheap on international exchanges".

We asked about Xekinima's call for a Syriza-led government "with a socialist programme", apparently modelled on the old slogan of the Socialist Party's forerunners in Britain, "Labour to power on a socialist programme". Is it even conceivable that a grouping like Syriza could implement a "socialist programme" without soviets?

"Impossible!" replies Giannis. And: "I don't think soviets would help Syriza. They would help the working class, which is a different thing. Soviets could show Syriza the way. If Syriza does not follow that way, then the soviets will throw Syriza out. And KKE couldn't be the solution".

Where that leaves the Xekinima demand for a Syriza government "on a socialist programme", we don't know. We go on to ask about where Giannis sees any potential for development towards soviets in Greece? In neighbourhood assemblies?

"Yes, there have been very many neighbourhood assemblies. Can they develop? Life will show that. Society has to find ways to defend itself from the government. We will see how. A revolutionary has to be patient".

Unify the Trotskyists? "It's up to them. Some Trotskyist groups say Greece must leave the euro right now. We'll have to see as struggles develop. We'll talk with anyone interested.

"We have good relations with DEA and Kokkino, and of course we work together with SEK or Antarsya or any other group if we're in the same workplace".

Xekinima's main differences with the other groups? "I don't try to find differences. Some of our young comrades in Xekinima... But I say to them, if you take that attitude, you'll never be happy.

"Some groups say Israel must be wiped off the map, even by bombs, but I have comrades in both Israel and Palestine. I don't want Israel to be wiped off the map.

"If another left group comes to me with a suggestion to go to work as a volunteer in Palestine, I won't go with them. But we can work together in the workplace.

"One difference between Xekinima and all the other groups is our way of speaking. We are very easily understood. You can agree or disagree, but we are understood".

We asked about attitudes to the Greek military. "We don't want to pay for our troops to be in Afghanistan. Even a bourgeois government could start there.

"Yes, something could happen like 1967 [the military coup in Greece]. It's for the very far future. 2012 is not like 1967. People are more aware now.

"The leadership of the army could be elected, and a soldier is a citizen in uniform. A left government which digs deeper can deal with that problem".

"Antarsya proposes an anti-capitalist programme"

Interview with activists of the New Left Current, the biggest component of the Antarsya coalition, in Thessaloniki

We met Kostas Gousis of the New Left Current (NAR), Greece's biggest revolutionary-left group, at the White Tower, a 15th-century Ottoman fort and prison, built on the site of an older Byzantine fort, which is the central landmark of Thessaloniki.

For a place to sit and discuss, Kostas took us to a café - named "Hemingway" after the American author - run by an NAR member. It is a habit, he said, for NAR members to gather there on Sundays to chat and discuss.

NAR is the biggest component of Antarsya, a left electoral coalition also containing SEK (which is linked to the SWP in Britain) and a number of Maoist and other groups.

Theodora Polenta, *Solidarity's* main writer on Greece and a former member of NAR herself, says that NAR is very loose and eclectic. Although on paper NAR is one party operating within Antarsya as a broad coalition, in practice "on many issues Antarsya has more of a definite line than NAR have".

The weekly paper associated with NAR, *Prin*, is, according to Theodora, journalistically a good newspaper, but "it doesn't look like a left newspaper". It has a much wider readership than NAR and Antarsya, and doesn't "push" an NAR "line" much. Theodora compares its political character to *Red Pepper* in England, though *Prin* circulates much more widely.

Andreas Kloke from OKDE-Spartakos - fairly friendly to NAR, since Spartakos participates in and has no major complaints about the orientation of the Antarsya coalition - says that NAR has tendencies towards flirting with left nationalism and with sectarianism towards the trade-union structures.

Kostas introduces us to a number of NAR people in the café, including a member of the NAR national leadership who is also a leading activist in the teachers' union. But Kostas, a young activist with fluent English, does most of the talking himself.

"NAR was formed by a split from the KKE in 1989". That was because the KKE had joined a coalition government with New Democracy, on the pretext of combatting corruption? "It was not just the coalition question, but also issues around the collapse of the USSR. We wanted to break from the USSR as a model. We had almost a majority of the KKE youth.

"Today NAR participates in many alliances, electorally and in the unions - including even with EEK. The Antarsya coalition was formed in early 2009, after the December 2008 revolt. Two or three thousand people attended the founding meetings.

"Antarsya proposes a programme for the crisis. The fundamental issues are the debt, the eurozone and the EU, and the banks.

"On the debt, we say we are not responsible and we won't pay. We say nationalise the banks with workers' control.

"We reckoned the ruling-class propaganda would be that if we don't pay the debt, and we nationalise the banks, then they will expel us from Europe - so we campaign against the eurozone and the EU.

"We aim to convince the working class that Greek participation in the eurozone is in the capitalist interest. You can see that for example from the rise of Greek capitalist holdings in the Balkans.

"Participation in the eurozone and the EU over the last three decades [Greece joined the EU in 1981, and the euro in 2001] has resulted in unemployment, destruction of the agricultural sector and industrial sectors, and the conversion of the Greek economy to tourism and services. The EU and its dictates were responsible for all the aggressive attacks even before the crisis".

Maybe sensing that this sounds to us like nationalist special pleading, and like diverting the blame for solidly-based capitalist class strategies onto a relatively small corps of officials in Brussels, Kostas continues:

"This is an internationalist point of view. We don't want Greece out of the eurozone alone. We said the working classes of other countries will not let Greece be isolated.

"Our anti-capitalist programme has been developed in the struggles. We have contributed especially to developing the coordination of the base [first-level] unions.

"There have been many general strikes in Greece, but organised from the leadership - in fact, just declared, without political orientation, without continuation, and without organising workers' committees.

"The government tried to split private-sector from public-sector workers. The coordination has had real power, including in assemblies of many hundreds of workers. Closed workplaces have been occupied and run under workers' control".

"Now we have the first factory occupation here in Thessaloniki, at Filkeram Johnson (http://federacion-salonica.blogspot.gr/2012/07/blog-post_09.html).

"NAR also participated in the 'don't pay' movement, and the

squares movement, where we argued against the view that all parties are enemies".

What about the rest of the left?

"At first KKE said that there was no qualitatively different phase. Then they changed a bit, without saying that they had been wrong. They don't put much stress on the immediate issues of the debt, though - on a transitional programme. Instead they say everything depends on winning 'popular power', though since last October KKE has also raised the idea of cancellation of the debt.

"Although KKE had always been against the EU and the euro, in the crisis they have had no specific campaign on the issue, and have even said that it would be a disaster if Greece quits the euro now.

"KKE did not participate in the squares movement, or in the coordination of the base unions. KKE's union activity is all party-based. They declare some supposedly broad initiatives, but they are mostly just KKE members. Mostly they just organise campaigns in the unions, rather than struggles.

"We have always called for united fronts with the KKE, and sometimes had an impact".

This comment by Kostas was the only indication we got from any left group of a systematic tactic directed at KKE members, though, as Kostas also said, and no-one else said different, KKE is the only party in Greece with a heavy base in the working class.

We got the impression that NAR's united-front demands on the CP are appeals lobbed across a big divide, rather than the stuff of hand-to-hand combat. This would be because of KKE's mode of operation, above and beyond any errors by the non-KKE left.

And Syriza?

"In the first phase of the crisis, Syriza said renegotiate the debt, rather than cancel it. That means accepting the debt. We estimated, and we were right, that the ruling class would also call for renegotiating the debt.

"Syriza did not call coherently and clearly for nationalisation of the banks, and not, except episodically, for workers' control. One Syriza representative said in the June election that Syriza would nationalise the banks, but then sell them back again.

"The Syriza leadership's orientation to the eurozone and the EU is the weakest part of their answer. Syriza thinks it can change the balance of forces in the EU. That shows it has illusions about the imperialist nature of the EU.

"Syriza fights against the memorandum, but does not have a clear policy on the capitalist crisis behind it. When all the media were focused on Syriza, in the election campaign, two words were absent: capitalism and socialism. In fact no third way, no social-democratic way, is possible.

"In the unions some Syriza members collaborate with the bureaucracy, and some with the rank and file, especially members of the left current of Synaspismos.

"In the anti-fascist demonstrations on 8 June, KKE and Syriza did not participate".

Antarsya got "good results" in the municipal elections of October 2011 and in the 6 May legislative election. NAR has also done good work in the teachers' union. Antarsya has won 30% of the vote in the teachers' union elections in primary schools, and 10% in secondary schools.

(In Athens, Sofia from OKDE would cite the education unions as

an example of bureaucratism and passivity. Maybe there are different in Athens and in Thessaloniki).

"On 17 June, Antarsya had a bad result - 0.33% - our electoral base was pressed by Syriza. We participated in the election nonetheless because of the need to get to the public with an anti-capitalist programme.

"KKE also lost half its vote in the 17 June election. That may lead to debate in KKE. The KKE's losses are a different matter from Antarsya's. It is easier for Antarsya to regain ground. There could be a crisis in KKE.

"Many Syriza members are with the struggle, but one Syriza leader has said that workers should 'respect the court' which said that the Greek Steel strike is illegal".

We asked about the realities of Antarsya's local organisation.

"In Thessaloniki we have five local assemblies. We have 400 members altogether, maybe more now. NAR has 100 members in Thessaloniki, and has more than doubled since the start of the crisis".

(When we reported this comment to Theodora Polenta, *Solidarity's* main writer on Greece, she doubted the figure 400. If Syriza has 2000 members in Thessaloniki, on a wide definition of 'member', can Antarsya really have as many as 400? She doubted it. But it may be that the disproportion between Antarsya and Syriza in *membership* is smaller than in *voters*. And that may explain why Antarsya members are "stuck" in a stand-offish attitude to Syriza. They think of it as bigger in membership by only a relatively manageable factor, and have not adjusted to the new flow of support to Syriza.)

"Antarsya assemblies meet maybe monthly. Each assembly has a committee, which should meet weekly. There is also a Thessaloniki committee of Antarsya, which should meet weekly.

"We are also working for Antarsya committees in workplaces. That is a project under construction.

"Antarsya is not just an electoral front. The groups in Antarsya do their main work through Antarsya, not separately. Many members of Antarsya are not members of any of the organised subgroups within it.

"NAR does have its activities. We have an annual festival with 10,000 people. NAR is not organised by local districts, but sectorally. Our membership is mainly youth.

"Antarsya is relatively strong in universities. It wins 10% of the vote in elections there. School students also mobilise, but they have no ongoing committees".

How does Antarsya deal with disagreements between its subgroups? "We try to reach a consensus, and then we vote. We require a two-thirds majority for some serious matters".

We asked about the coordination of base (first-level) unions which Kostas had mentioned as a place where Antarsya makes its main contribution.

"It has gatherings with representatives from different unions. It works through consensus. The frequency of meetings varies. It could be once every two months or so.

"There could be about 40 at representatives' meetings, though 100 or 150 if there is a general assembly".

Which unions are involved? Kostas first mentioned teachers' unions - five first-level teachers' unions, from five districts.

It visibly took more thought to compile the list of other unions taking part: textile workers' unions, hospital unions (each

hospital will have its own first-level union), a lawyers' union, a book and paper industry union, a union of technicians and mechanics, a union of the construction workers employed on the building of the Thessaloniki metro.

Politically, said Kostas, the main influences represented are Antarsya (mainly NAR), and the left current of Synaspismos.

OKDE comrades would also tell us about these coordinations, and see them as important, though they gave a less enthusiastic picture than NAR. EEK would tell us that the coordinations are too narrow, and that they, EEK, in collaboration with some anarcho-syndicalists, are building an "initiative for an independent workers' centre" in opposition both to these coordinations and to the official "second-level" structures.

Finally, we asked Kostas his view on prospects if Syriza forms a government.

"It depends on the circumstances. It depends on how organisation develops in the coming months.

"Antarsya proposes a front of all the committees that have emerged in the crisis. If big struggles have happened, there will be a radicalisation. If we have a normal parliamentary change, then the bourgeoisie will put heavy pressure on Syriza, that could have a bad effect on the radicalisation of the movement, on Syriza's electoral base - and on Antarsya's.

"There are left forces in Syriza, but they do not have power within it. The leadership has a coherent majority. But a radical programme could have an impact and could change the balance of forces.

"Everything will be decided by the debate in the movement, and whether struggles win".

"A revolution is very imminent"

By Ed Maltby

Interview with an activist from EEK.

I met Marius from EEK, an organisation in Greece which springs from the political tradition of Gerry Healy's Workers' Revolutionary Party in the UK (once a strong force on the far left; but it collapsed in 1985). EEK is now affiliated to an international network called the CRFI, in which the main force is Jorge Altamira's Partido Obrero in Argentina (which had some international links with Healy in the 1960s).

Marius told me that EEK has about 200 members and is mostly based in Athens, but has a small group in Thessaloniki. It publishes a fortnightly paper. It does not participate in Antarsya or Syriza, but stood its own candidates in the May elections, winning 6,098 votes, 0.1% across the country.

I asked Marius what the main activity of EEK was and he replied, "making propaganda to explain that a 'Left Government' [Syriza's slogan describing their project] would not be adequate and that what is needed is a revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat".

Aside from that, he said, EEK has initiated a project in the trade unions alongside some anarcho-syndicalists (in a group called

Rossinande) and some comrades from a split from the New Left Current, called the "Initiative for an Independent Workers' Centre". Marius criticised the co-ordination of base-level unions, the informal network of left activists in base-level unions in which Syriza and Antarsya members and other leftwing activists are the driving force (see our interviews with the New Left Current and with OKDE): he described it as "another PAME" [the tightly controlled KKE front-organisation in the trade unions]; bureaucratic; and held back by the participation of reformists in Synaspismos. He said that the co-ordination of first-level unions had sabotaged attempts to hold an assembly after a demonstration on February 12 and had shown its conservatism by refusing to physically blockade a military parade during a counter-demonstration against it.

He described the main goal of the Initiative as "the organisation of a general strike", but also the creation of local initiatives: Marius says that such an initiative has been set up among operatives in the Athens State Telephone centre and also among drivers of tourist buses in Athens.

On popular assemblies, Marius takes a cautious view. He says that while some of them reflect real political life, others are gerrymandered by and controlled by particular political groups. So, he says that in September 2011 there was a move to co-ordinate popular committees nationally, and 'miraculously', ten new committees were set up overnight – mostly by the Maoist group KOE.

Marius said he participated in an assembly in the north of Thessaloniki against mobile phone masts, which regrouped 50-60 people but had a difficult existence and had to be re-launched 3 or 4 times.

Overall, Marius said that the currently-existing popular assemblies are less useful than workplace assemblies would be – that they regroup petit-bourgeois elements as well as proletarian elements and that at best they can be regarded as a "rehearsal" of self-organisation, useful from the point of view of the preparation of "more class-defined" workers' councils.

On Europe Marius says that EEK's view is that "in or out of Europe" is a false dilemma; leaving the Euro would be an economic disaster in the short term and not politically useful; but then Syriza's programme of "struggling to reform the EU" is hopeless. Perhaps in the course of the struggle Greece would leave the EU, but that's not the point, Marius said. "Our goal is to destroy the imperialist EU and create the Socialist United States of Europe". The idea that the question of membership of the Euro and the EU would be a key question for a long period of time is a canard – "the difference between us and most other left groups is that we think that a revolution is very imminent".

If this current government falls and Syriza gets in, I asked, what did Marius think would happen? He gave his personal point of view – "A Syriza government would probably not be much different to what we have now. Between the two elections, Syriza moved to the right. Before the May election they wanted to stop the memorandum. But now they are talking about 'exposing' or 'renegotiating' it. Because of pressure from the EU and other forces, Syriza will likely wind up implementing the memorandum, albeit differently to how ND and PASOK might do it".

Marius reasons that the outcome of such a betrayal would be the discrediting of the entire left in the eyes of the workers, and the rapid rise of the fascist far-right. He regards the two alternatives to this as a revolutionary overthrow before the next election – or failing that, another ND-led government as a preferable alternative to the debacle of a Syriza-led government.

In the EEK material we've read, we've also seen a more-or-less permanent advocacy of a continuing general strike as the major general slogan, in effect *the* general political slogan, and as *the* route to revolution.

It may well often in Greece's crisis when the slogan of an all-out general strike, for defined aims but with an explanation of the open-ended nature of such a mobilisation, is timely. On the elevation of the general strike slogan to a general political answer, some comments from Trotsky may be relevant.

From *The Third Period of the Comintern's Errors*

To put forward today the slogan of a general political strike on the basis of a future crisis that will push the masses onto the road of revolutionary struggle is to try to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow. When Molotov stated at the Tenth Plenum that the general strike has in effect been put on the order of the day in France, he only showed once too often that he does not know France, nor the order, nor the day. The anarchists and syndicalists compromise the very idea of a general strike in France. Official Communism goes along with them, attempting to substitute adventurist goat-leaps for systematic revolutionary work.

The political activity of the masses, before it assumes a more decisive form, for a shorter or longer period may express itself in more frequent attendance at meetings, in broader distribution of Communist literature, in additional electoral votes, in increased membership in the party. Can the leadership adopt in advance a worked-out orientation based on a stormy tempo of development, come what may? No. It must be prepared for one or another tempo. Only in this way can the party, not altering its revolutionary direction, march in step with the class.

In reply to these considerations, I can already hear a tender voice, like grating tin, accusing me of "economism" on the one hand and capitalist optimism on the other, and of course Social-Democratic deviations as well. For the Molotovs, everything they cannot grasp - that is, a great deal - falls under the heading of Social-Democratic deviations, just as for primitives 99 percent of the universe is explained by the activity of evil spirits. Following Molotov, Semard and Monmousseau Will teach us that the question is not exhausted by conjunctural shifts, that there are many other factors, for example, rationalisation of industry and approaching war. These people talk about "many" factors all the more that they are incapable of explaining a single one of them. Yes, we will reply to them, war would overthrow the whole perspective and would open up, so to speak, a new chronology. But first, we do not know today when war will come, nor what gates it will come through...

The art of revolutionary leadership is primarily the art of correct political orientation. Under all conditions, Communism prepares the political vanguard and through it the working class as a whole for the revolutionary seizure of power. But it does it differently in different fields of the labour movement and in different periods.

One of the most important elements in orientation is the determination of the temper of the masses, their activity and readiness for struggle. The mood of the masses, however, is not predetermined. It changes under the influence of certain laws of mass psychology that are set into motion by objective social conditions. The political state of the class is subject, within certain limits, to a quantitative determination - press circulation, attendance at meetings, elections, demonstrations, strikes, etc., etc.

In order to understand the dynamics of the process it is necessary

to determine in what direction and why the mood of the working class is changing. Combining subjective and objective data, it is possible to establish a tentative perspective of the movement, that is, a scientifically based prediction, with out which a serious revolutionary struggle is in general in conceivable. But a prediction in politics does not have the character of a perfect blueprint; it is a working hypothesis.

While leading the struggle in one direction or another, it is necessary to attentively follow the changes in the objective and subjective elements of the movement, in order to opportunely introduce corresponding corrections in tactics. Even though the actual development of the struggle never fully corresponds to the prognosis, that does not absolve us from making political predictions. One must not, however, get intoxicated with finished schemata, but continually refer to the course of the historic process and adjust to its indications.

From *The Belgian Dispute and the De Man Plan*

The gravest mistake for which La Voix can be reproached - here I am in complete accord with Comrade Martin - is that our Belgian friends identify the revolutionary struggle too much with the general strike. Just as a simple strike has need, above all in this epoch, of a picket line, so a general strike needs a workers' militia, which in the last analysis is nothing else but a generalized picket line. The general strike poses the problem of power, but does not resolve it. What is always involved at bottom is the question of armed force. The fascists penetrate everywhere, in the barracks, through the officers on active duty as well as those in the reserves. The proletarian vanguard should step up their efforts to strengthen their moral ties with their brothers in the barracks. Thus the struggle for power requires not only preparation of the general strike but also education of the will of the vanguard to pass from the defensive to the offensive, to set about creating a workers' militia and to win over the workers in the army. But it is very significant that Vereecken doesn't breathe a word about this. He condemns La Voix only when it is perfectly correct.

From *In The Middle Of The Road*

The question of the general strike has a long and rich history, in theory as well as practice. Yet the leaders of the ILP behave as if they were the first to run across the idea of general strike, as a method to stop war. In this is their greatest error. Improvisation is impermissible precisely on the question of the general strike. The world experience of the struggle during the last forty years has been fundamentally a confirmation of what Engels had to say about the general strike toward the close of the last century, primarily on the basis of the experience of the Chartists, and in part of the Belgians. Cautioning the Austrian Social Democrats against much too flighty an attitude toward the general strike, Engels wrote to Kautsky, on November 3, 1893, as follows:

"You yourself remark that the barricades have been antiquated (they may, however, prove useful again should the army turn one-third or two-fifths socialist and the question arises of providing it with the opportunity to turn its bayonets), but the political strike must either prove victorious immediately by the threat alone (as in Belgium, where the army was very shaky), or it must end in a colossal fiasco, or, finally lead directly to the barricades."

These terse lines provide, incidentally, a remarkable exposition of Engels' views on a number of questions... Engels... differentiates, as we have seen, between three cases in relation to the political strike:

1. The government takes fright at the general strike, and at the very outset, without carrying matters to an open clash, takes to

concessions. Engels points to the "shaky" condition of the army in Belgium as the basic condition for the success of the Belgian general strike (1893). A somewhat similar situation, but on a much more colossal scale, occurred in Russia, October, 1905. After the miserable outcome of the Russo-Japanese War, the Czarist army was, or, at any rate, seemed extremely unreliable. The Petersburg government, thrown into a mortal panic by the strike, made the first constitutional concessions (Manifesto, October 17, 1905).

It is all too evident, however, that without resorting to decisive battles, the ruling class will make only such concessions as will not touch the basis of its rule. That is precisely how matters stood in Belgium and Russia. Are such cases possible in the future? They are inevitable in the countries of the Orient. They are, generally speaking, less probable in the countries of the West, although, here too, they are quite possible as partial episodes of the unfolding revolution.

2. If the army is sufficiently reliable, and the government feels sure of itself; if a political strike is promulgated from above, and if, at the same time, it is calculated not for decisive battles, but to "frighten" the enemy, then it can easily turn out a mere adventure, and reveal its utter impotence. To this we ought to add that after the initial experiences of the general strike, the novelty of which reacted upon the imagination of the popular masses as well as governments, several decades have elapsed – discounting the half-forgotten Chartists – in the course of which the strategists of capital have accumulated an enormous experience. That is why a general strike, particularly in the old capitalist countries, requires a painstaking Marxist account of all the concrete circumstances.

3. Finally, there remains a general strike which, as Engels put it, "leads directly to the barricades." A strike of this sort can result either in complete victory or defeat. But to shy away from battle, when the battle is forced by the objective situation, is to lead inevitably to the most fatal and demoralizing of all possible defeats. The outcome of a revolutionary, insurrectionary general strike depends, of course, upon the relationship of forces, covering a great number of factors; the class differentiation of society, the specific weight of the proletariat, the mood of the lower layers of the petty bourgeoisie, the social composition and the political mood of the army, etc. However, among the conditions for victory, far from the last place is occupied by the correct revolutionary leadership, a clear understanding of conditions and methods of the general strike and its transition to open revolutionary struggle.

Engels' classification must not, of course, be taken dogmatically. In present-day France not partial concessions but power is indubitably in question: the revolutionary proletariat or fascism – which? The working class masses want to struggle. But the leadership applies the brakes, hoodwinks and demoralizes the workers. A general strike can flare up just as the movements flared in Toulon and Brest. Under these conditions, independently of its immediate results, a general strike will not of course be a "putsch" but a necessary stage in the mass struggle, the necessary means for casting off the treachery of the leadership and for creating within the working class itself the preliminary conditions for a victorious uprising. In this sense the policy of the French Bolshevik-Leninists is entirely correct, who have advanced the slogan of a general strike, and who explain the conditions for its victory. The French cousins of the SAP (Socialist Workers Party of Germany, a Brandlerite split-off from the CP) come out against this slogan; the Spartacists who are at the beginning of the struggle are already assuming the role of strikebreakers.

We should also add that Engels did not point out another

"category" of general strike, exemplars of which have been provided in England, Belgium, France and some other countries: we refer here to cases in which the leadership of the strike previously, i.e., without a struggle, arrives at an agreement with the class enemy as to the course and outcome of the strike. The parliamentarians and the trade unionists perceive at a given moment the need to provide an outlet for the accumulated ire of the masses, or they are simply compelled to jump in step with a movement that has flared over their heads. In such cases they come scurrying through the back stairs to the government and obtain the permission to head the general strike, this with the obligation to conclude it as soon as possible without any damage being done to the state crockery. Sometimes, far from always, they manage to haggle beforehand some petty concessions, to serve them as figleaves. Thus did the General Council of British Trade Unions (TUC) in 1926. Thus did Jouhaux in 1934. Thus will they act in the future also. The exposure of these contemptible machinations behind the backs of the struggling proletariat enters as a necessary part into the preparation of a general strike.

... A general strike can be put on the order of the day as a method of struggle against mobilization and war only in the event that the entire preceding developments in the country have placed revolution and armed insurrection on the order of the day. Taken, however, as a "special" method of struggle against mobilization, a general strike would be a sheer adventure. Excluding a possible but nevertheless an exceptional case of a government plunging into war in order to escape from a revolution that directly threatens it, it must remain, as a general rule, that precisely prior to, during and after mobilization the government feels itself strongest, and consequently, least inclined to allow itself to be scared by a general strike. The patriotic moods that accompany mobilization, together with the war terror, make hopeless the very execution of a general strike, as a rule. The most intrepid elements which, without taking the circumstances into account, plunge into the struggle, would be crushed. The defeat, and the partial annihilation of the vanguard, would make difficult for a long time revolutionary work in the atmosphere of dissatisfaction that war breeds. A strike called artificially must turn inevitably into a putsch, and into an obstacle in the path of the revolution.

In its theses accepted in April, 1935, the ILP writes as follows:

"The policy of the party aims at the use of a general strike to stop war and at social revolution should war occur."

An astonishingly precise, but – sad to say – absolutely fictitious obligation! The general strike is not only separated here from the social revolution but also counterposed to it as a specific method to "stop war." This is an ancient conception of the anarchists which life itself smashed long ago. A general strike without a victorious insurrection cannot "stop war." If, under the conditions of mobilization, the insurrection is impossible, then so is a general strike impossible.

In an ensuing paragraph we read:

"The ILP will urge a general strike against the British government, if this country is in any way involved in an attack on the Soviet Union ..."

If it is possible to forestall any war by a general strike, then of course it is all the more necessary to stop war against the USSR. But here we enter into the realm of illusion: to inscribe in the theses a general strike as punishment for a given capital crime of the government is to commit the sin of revolutionary phrasemongering.

If it were possible to call a general strike at will, then it would be

best called today to prevent the British government from strangling India and from collaborating with Japan to strangle China. The leaders of the ILP will of course tell us that they have not the power to do so. But nothing gives them the right to promise that they will apparently have the power to call a general strike on the day of mobilization. And if they be able, why confine it to a strike?... the aim of revolutionary policy should not be an isolated general strike, as a special means to "stop war," but the proletarian revolution into which a general strike will enter as an inevitable or a very probable integral part.

Also:

<http://www.workersliberty.org/ljc>

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/08/28/workers-fight-general-strike-and-call-labour-government-1972-3>

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/11/23/strikes-and-shallow-slogans>

"Stop dreaming about elections, move to the streets!"

Interviews with Mihalis Skourtis and Andreas Kloke of OKDE-Spartakos

Mihalis Skourtis and Andreas Kloke spoke to Martin Thomas at the Anti-Racist Festival in Athens on 6 July 2012.

They are long-standing leaders of OKDE-Spartakos (not to be confused with the other OKDE, publishing *Ergatiki Pali*). OKDE-Spartakos is the official group in Greece of the Fourth International (a network centred around activists in the NPA in France). OKDE-Spartakos participates in the Antarsya coalition, together with NAR and SEK (both of which are much larger than Spartakos). It recently clashed with the Fourth International bureau over the bureau's statement, backing Syriza rather than Antarsya, on the 17 June 2012 Greek elections: <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2643>. In Greece the Fourth International also recognises Kokkino, a participant in Syriza, as an "observer" group: <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?auteur831>.

"The first thing", said Mihalis, "is for all the organisations of the left, especially the radical and internationalist left, and no matter how they voted on 17 June, to go back on the streets.

"Over the summer", he said, "we will all have a few holidays. But as from the end of August, we must all return to the streets".

Street action is needed on three main issues: against the fascists; against the government; and in solidarity with the poor and the homeless.

Over the last two and a half year, Mihalis continued, we have seen that workers have not trusted the bureaucrats, and have tried to self-organise.

I asked Mihalis about the idea that Sofia from OKDE had put to me, that in coming elections the old Pasok-aligned union leaders can be swept out of office.

"Yes", he said. "Not all of them, of course!" But he saw movement. For example in the local government workers' union, even a small left group like OKDE-Spartakos has two representatives on the all-Greece committee.

Can the Greek Trotskyists - or at least some of them - unify?

Mihalis said that unification must come on the streets and not from discussions behind closed doors.

OKDE-Spartakos can work with OKDE and EEK a bit on the streets, but they won't come into Antarsya.

Mihalis thought Trotskyist groups in Syriza would now face the prospect of having to dismantle their organisations as Syriza becomes a single party rather than a coalition. "Sooner or later", said Mihalis, "the Trotskyists in Syriza will have to leave it. They are already thinking about Plan B. Syriza has moved to the right even since 6 May.

"Syriza's five points, which the Fourth International referred to in order to justify supporting Syriza" [Spartakos protested at the Fourth International's stance] "don't even exist any more. Syriza has abandoned them".

Won't new radicalised people come into Syriza? "If the left doesn't get onto the streets, people have no reason to go the left. They will go to the Nazis.

"The situation is hard. Left-wingers should stop dreaming about elections and broad parties, and move to the streets".

OKDE-Spartakos puts special emphasis on the idea of workers' control: the slogan (in English) was splashed across the issue of the group's irregular magazine, Spartakos, which it was promoting on its stall.

Andreas Kloke took me through a narrative of the last couple of years in Greece, and gave me his assessment of the Greek far left.

Describing the role of the KKE [Communist Party] in the movement, he said that it had proved itself "the most right-wing part of the movement", and was "always trying to split the movement". By contrast, Antarsya, some other left group, and Synaspismos [the biggest group in Syriza], especially the Synaspismos youth, have always participated in the mobilisations.

Most of the Greek far left, Andreas said, is of Stalinist origin. The biggest group is NAR, the New Left Current, created by the KKE's [Communist Party's] expulsion of a large part of its youth section in 1989.

You can't call NAR Stalinist any more, said Andreas. It has different currents in it. Some of the currents are "a bit left-nationalist", and some are "a bit sectarian towards the trade unions".

OKDE-Spartakos is in the Antarsya coalition with ARAN and ARAS (two groups of Maoist and Eurocommunist origin), the SEK (Greek group linked to the SWP in Britain), and a number of smaller groups.

Andreas reckoned that the political decisions of the Antarsya conference in late 2011 were "all basically programmatically correct". Antarsya rejected paying the debt; called for the nationalisation of the banks and big capital under workers' control; and declared that the crisis is a worldwide capitalist crisis and cannot be dealt with by parliamentary means.

The Greek Trotskyists: a sketch outline

By Martin Thomas

A brief tour of the history and current differentiations of Greek Trotskyism.

Greece is one of the few countries where a main organiser, writer, and theoretician of the communist movement in its heroic early years then became directly the leader of the Trotskyist movement, and handed down writings which still inspire today.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE), founded in 1918, was the only serious party of the left and of the labour movement. The first general secretary of the KKE, Pandelis Pouliopoulos, sided with the Left Opposition against Stalinism as early as 1927.

Another sizeable KKE opposition, the Archeo-Marxists, also oriented to the Left Opposition. Pouliopoulos and a section of the Archeo-Marxists united in 1934 to form the OKDE, Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece.

The Trotskyists suffered under the repression of the Metaxas dictatorship (from 1936) and the Nazi occupation of Greece (from 1941). They were also massacred by the now-Stalinist KKE.

In December 1944, in complicated conflict between the forces loyal to the Greek bourgeoisie, the Stalinists, dissident elements of the Stalinist-led resistance movement which had fought the Nazis, and the British army, a Stalinist leader claimed to have killed several hundred Trotskyists.

To the Stalinist leader, no doubt, "Trotskyist" signified any left-wing rebel. British prime minister Winston Churchill used the same terminology, telling the British Parliament that the British military intervention was to aid the proper Greek government against "Trotskyists".

A more careful survey indicates that the Stalinists murdered 34 actual Trotskyists. Others fell to the German and Italian occupiers, or to the Metaxas government.

After 1944

In July 1946, 34 delegates from three Trotskyist fragments remaining after the multiple repression united under the hopeful name KDKE (Party of Communist Internationalists of Greece, later to be replaced by the old name OKDE). Michael Raptis, a prewar Greek Trotskyist (from 1929: Archeo-Marxist in 1982-9) who since 1937 had been abroad, in Switzerland then France, and since about 1944 had been a leading figure in European Trotskyism, came to and helped convene the conference.

But Raptis (who now mostly used the name Pablo) was in France, and played no special role in the Greek movement. In the views of many, including AWL, his codification of a perspective of more-or-less automatically-unfolding "world revolution", which, unfortunately, deformingly, but inevitably, would be largely led by Stalinists for now, would hinder rather than help the Trotskyists. Raptis-Pablo would return to Greece in old age, after 1974, pick up on his old friendship with Pasok leader Andreas Papandreu (who had briefly been a Trotskyist in 1938-9), and be granted a state funeral when he died in 1996.

Cornelius Castoriadis, who had been in the Greek Trotskyist movement from 1942 to 1945, developed a critique of the Stalinist USSR as a system of class exploitation (which he at first called bureaucratic-collectivist, and then state-capitalist), with quarter-anarchist different political conclusions; but he did that from within the French Trotskyist movement, after moving to France in December 1945, and all his subsequent political

activity was in France. In Greece itself, Agis Stinas developed a similar view, and organised a small group linked with Castoriadis's "Socialisme ou Barbarie" in France. Like the French group, it faded away in the 1960s. As far as I know, no Trotskyist in Greece identified more closely with the more developed "Third Camp" views of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, and others.

In some European countries, such as France, extrapolations of Pablo's perspective into a tactic of having the Trotskyists try to join the still very tightly-controlled mass Communist Parties as secret factions rallied many Trotskyists to the side of Cannon. As far as I know, no similar tactic was proposed in Greece, where the Stalinists, though still a major force in the working class, were themselves illegal (though with a tolerated legal "front").

Within KDKE/OKDE, Christos Anastasiades broadly sympathised with Pablo, and Loukas Karliaftis with Cannon. In 1958, they split. In 1964 Karliaftis's group rallied to the "International Committee", which was now led by Gerry Healy and Pierre Lambert, since Cannon and his comrades were moving towards reunification with the strand which had been led by Pablo and was now led by Ernest Mandel.

The 1960s and the military dictatorship

By the 1960s, Greece was becoming a majority-urban society. Today, four million of its eleven million people live in Athens alone. At the birth of the modern Greek state, in the 1820s, its capital, Athens, had been a village of 5000 people, and far more urban Greeks lived in Istanbul (then Constantinople, and home to 200,000 Greeks at that time) or Alexandria (with tens of thousands of Greeks then, and over 100,000 at the high point of its Greek population).

The CIA-backed military coup in Greece, in 1967, drove the Trotskyists underground again.

This period of military rule, however, also brought new elements into the movement. Many left-wing Greek students and young people ended up in London.

The Greek "International Committee" group came under the close influence of Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League and Workers' Revolutionary Party. In 1975-6, soon after the fall of the dictatorship, Healy would organise the expulsion of Dimitri Toubanis (Sklavos), who for some years (replacing Karliaftis) had led the Greek group, and replace him with Savvas Michael, who was closer to Healy.

Michael remained loyal to Healy through the 1985 explosion and collapse of the WRP in Britain, but was eventually, in 1987, disowned by Healy for refusing to go along with the elderly and disoriented Healy's enthusiasm for Gorbachev in the USSR.

Michael's group, EEK, remains relatively intact. It retains some of the declamatory style of the old Healy movement, and seems to continue the habit which the Healy movement got into from 1970 to 1985, of demanding an all-out general strike, week in week out, as the universal answer. But it no longer refers to Healy's ideas or writings as a model. It is now linked with Jorge Altamira's Partido Obrero in Argentina (a group which has an "International Committee" background, but which, along with the French "International Committee" people, parted ways with Healy in the early 1970s).

EEK says it has about 200 members. It publishes a fortnightly paper. It does not participate in either of the two main left coalition in Greece, Syriza or Antarsya.

Another group of young Greeks in London, notably Panos Garganas and Maria Styllou, came under the influence of the International Socialists (later SWP), led by Tony Cliff. After

1974 they would launch the OSE, now called SEK.

Styllou describes the evolution like this: "I had moved to London and was at the London School of Economics. I first met members of the IS [forerunners of the SWP] in 1966... The 1967 events made me break from the reformists and the 1967-68 world events plus my relations with IS brought me to revolutionary politics. Then we started building the first Greek group in Britain...

"In 1974 when the Junta fell we all went back to Greece. We started building OSE... with around 15 people. We quickly moved to 50 members but we faced an upsurge and revival of Maoist politics.

"The first important victory that we got was during the last years of Pasok [government] in the late 1980s - years of deep crisis and scandals... This opened up an audience for us and new opportunities. We moved to a fortnightly paper. In 1993 when Pasok returned to government we moved to a weekly paper and started growing politically, in numbers and in influence..."

SEK is the most important group of the SWP's international network outside Britain, and since the 1990s at latest has probably been the biggest of the would-be Trotskyist groups in Greece. In some ways it is senior to SWP: Garganas and Styllou, still leaders of SEK, were leading an organisation, amid political tumult, long before any of the current members of the SWP Central Committee did anything much in politics.

SEK is in the Antarsya coalition. Other Trotskyist groups in Greece say that the SEK suffers a rapid turnover of members, is erratic and opportunist in analysis and tactics, and achieves little in the way of solid revolutionary Marxist influence in the labour movement; but it is the only group able to sustain a weekly paper.

Yet another new element in the Greek Trotskyist left was Xekinima, launched in 1974, and initially as a faction within Pasok, the social-democratic party set up by Andreas Papandreou that same year. It was influenced and shaped by Militant in Britain (today Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal: as well as Xekinima, linked to the SP, there is today a small group in Greece, a faction in Synaspismos, linked to Socialist Appeal).

The splinters from the KKE

KKE, pursuing a diehard-Stalinist line, is still the strongest party of the Greek left, with the strongest base in the working class. For over fifty years now, since Stalinism began to fray around 1956, it has suffered a series of splits, Maoist, Eurocommunist, and other, generating a large variety of groups which shape the political field within which the Greek Trotskyist groups operate.

There are ten groups in the Antarsya coalition (founded 2009) and thirteen in the Syriza coalition (founded 2004). Most of those 23 groups have some historical connection to a split from the KKE, and are shaped to some degree by elements of KKE tradition. In addition there are Maoist groups outside both Syriza and Antarsya, such as KKE-ML and ML-KKE, likewise with KKE roots.

The biggest of the post-KKE groups are Synaspismos, the leading faction in Syriza, originating from the "Eurocommunist" current; and New Left Current, the leading faction in Antarsya, originating in a 1989 split against KKE's participation in a bourgeois coalition government, and politically eclectic (though "Trotskyist" enough that it will talk about "transitional programme").

Greek nationalism

Back in 1940, Pandelis Pouliopoulos wrote: "The composition of

a revolutionary proletarian party in Greece is impossible without the struggle against nationalism in general and particularly on the Macedonian question. The KKE's nationalism not only facilitated its treacherous policy of class collaboration - 'Popular Front'... it will express itself unavoidably also during the war, with social-patriotic positions in other fields too, for example the national question of the people of Dodecanese, Cyprus..."

Left nationalism, expressed as anti-EUism, has long been axiomatic for the KKE, if only because USSR foreign policy dictated opposition to the EU.

Pasok, when it was founded in 1974, made "national independence" one of its four slogans, meaning opposition to the EU and to NATO. That did not stop Pasok governments taking part in the EU and NATO! But there were strong pumps infusing the Greek left with nationalism.

Both Stalinism and, to some degree, the early Pasok were informed by a picture of the world as divided into two camps, originating in Stalinist ideology of the late 1940s. Some countries and nations are in the "imperialist camp", led by the USA. Others are in the "anti-imperialist" or "progressive" camp. They are defined as such by hostility to the USA and, in the original version, friendliness to the USSR.

The picture defines it as desirable to side with the "anti-imperialist" camp, and to separate Greece from groupings like the EU so as to transfer it to that "anti-imperialist" camp.

The SWP-Britain tradition to which SEK and DEA subscribe contained, for a while, elements of a radical rejection of the "two-camps" picture and advocacy of a working-class "third camp". It defined the Stalinist USSR as imperialist. Since about 1987 the SWP-Britain and its offshoots have gone over wholesale to a new version of the "two-camps" scheme. The "anti-imperialist" camp, in their view of recent decades, is defined by forces militantly against the USA, more or less regardless of what they are *for*: the chief exemplars are Hamas, the Taliban, Hezbollah, etc. ("We are all Hezbollah!")

Thus the infusion into Greek Trotskyism of SWP-Britain influence has not, at least in recent decades, helped to dispel the old influences.

In Greece there has been much grist for nationalist mills, in two distinct senses.

For centuries Greece was subjugated by the Ottoman Empire. An independent Greece was created in the 1820s, but under heavy informal domination by Britain and an imposed monarchy of foreign origin. Its area was originally only a small fraction of today's Greece. Greece has had repeated conflicts about border areas, and even today some people in Greece will not call ex-Yugoslav Macedonia "Macedonia", for fear of prejudicing the Greek claim that Macedonia is part of Greece. (They call it "Skopje" instead).

After World War One Greece was manipulated into war against Turkey as a proxy by Britain and other powers. The war resulted in massacre and mass expulsion for the Greeks of Smyrna (now Izmir), and large forced population movements of Greeks and Turks.

The British army intervened heavily in Greece at the end of and after World War Two to suppress the Stalinist-led movement which had resisted the Nazi occupation. The CIA had a hand in the 1967 military coup.

Britain held on to Cyprus until 1960, and resisted the demands for the unification of the island, which has a large Greek majority, with Greece. In 1974 the Greek military junta carried out a coup to try to force unification of the island with Greece.

Turkey invaded Cyprus and created a separate "Turkish Cypriot" state. The junta fell.

At the same time, the Greek wealthy classes have long had large international operations. They made up a large part of the elite of the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (Istanbul), of the bourgeoisie of Alexandria, in Egypt, and of the magnates of the world shipping industry. Greece has the largest merchant fleet in the world.

Thus Greece has been both a mistreated nation, and the nation of a bourgeoisie with international ambitions.

The people of Greece were reluctant to enter the European Union (1981) and the eurozone (2001). The current big majorities in Greece for keeping the euro can be explained from the fact that until the current crisis Greek bourgeois society did, however, do relatively well out of the EU. Income and wage and productivity differentials between Greece and Northern Europe narrowed. Between 1979 and 2007 Greek GNP per head increased from 38% of the Netherlands' to 54%.

That Greek people with some knowledge of history are doubtful about a return to the drachma is understandable. Greece spent 95 years of the 180 between independence and entry to the euro in 2001 in default, with five separate defaults.

Capitalist productive forces have made national barriers in Europe outdated, and socialism must go beyond capitalism in that respect, not fall behind it. Nevertheless, there must be many people in Greece who see rejection of demands for Greece to hivel itself off and erect high economic barriers around itself, not as enlightened understanding of that Marxist thesis, but as regrettable timidity, typical of the Syriza leadership.

All this sets the scene for Maoists and others to agitate about "anti-imperialist struggle", and for elements in Antarsya to complain about how the EU has blighted Greece's national development.

Greek Trotskyists and the EU

That structures a differentiation among Greek Trotskyists. Some groups take part in and orient to Syriza, and reject the demand for Greece to quit the euro and the EU. Others take part in Antarsya, and champion that demand.

The old OKDE has divided into OKDE, publishing *Ergatiki Pali*, and OKDE-Spartakos, publishing *Spartakos*. Both groups consider themselves in broad terms to be instructed by the theories of Ernest Mandel.

OKDE-Spartakos is the group officially recognised by the main international network of those who look to Mandel's ideas, the Fourth International centred round activists in the French NPA. It is in the Antarsya coalition, and, despite muttering about NAR's tendencies to left nationalism, goes along with NAR's and Antarsya's prioritising of Greek exit from the EU as the immediate demand deemed to separate Antarsya, as revolutionaries, from Syriza, as reformists.

OKDE is the larger group by some margin, though still not big enough to publish *Ergatiki Pali* more than monthly. It has separated from the Fourth International network, objecting in 2005 to "deliberate ambiguity on whether the objective is to build up 4th International sections or anti-capitalist parties. In fact, many sections (or however they can be called) are slipping into very dangerous alliances, which end up in centrist parties or even alliances with social-liberal advocates of neo-liberalism... a member of the Brazilian section [became] a minister of the Cabinet in a government that the International itself considers neoliberal... the recent dissolution of the Portuguese section into a current inside the Left Block will lead to the destruction of a

historic base of 4th internationalism in Europe... The platform of Respect [in Britain], which our comrades energetically participate in, is on the borderline of a petit bourgeois platform..."

In line with this emphasis, OKDE prides itself on having - and seems in fact to have - a more rigorous orientation to grass-roots working-class organisation, and stricter standards of Bolshevik party-building, than other would-be Trotskyist groups in Greece.

Like EEK, it stands outside both Syriza and Antarsya. But it makes Greek exit from the EU a leading demand as much as Antarsya does.

EEK has more complex position. It denounces Antarsya on the European question: "the line for an exit from the EU and abandonment of the euro, without the alternative of the United Socialist States of Europe, was indistinguishable from the line of the KKE.

"The call for a break with the euro and a return to a (devalued) drachma, within the capitalist framework, both in the case of the KKE and Antarsya, collided completely with the will of the vast majority of the Greek people, which is hostile to the EU because of its austerity measures that destroyed its living standards but nevertheless it sees a return to a devalued drachma as the culmination of the current catastrophe".

On a good day, Antarsya groups such as SEK and NAR do in fact advocate the United Socialist States of Europe, and explain that they call for an "*anti-capitalist*" exit from the EU. The slippage to advocating Greek exit from the EU as a good thing in itself, and perhaps even inherently anti-capitalist, results from a core nationalist myth which EEK shares: that the EU as such is somehow qualitatively more "imperialist" or "capitalist" than its member states. EEK advocates "workers fighting to smash the imperialist EU to establish the United Socialist States of Europe".

As if the unarmed, relatively lightweight EU bureaucracy in Brussels were the key "imperialist" institution to be smashed, and once the economic links and treaties between the capitalist states of Europe were broken and replaced by nationalist barriers, those states would be benign!

As a focus on breaking up "the imperialist EU" makes more socialist sense than directing workers in California, say, to focus on smashing up the federal links of the imperialist USA, in order later to reassemble the severed states as a United Socialist States of North America.

The Trotskyists in Syriza

There are three Trotskyist groups which are inside Syriza, or orient to it, and which explicitly reject the demand for Greek exit from the euro, counterposing a drive to Europeanise the workers' struggle.

One is Xekinima, the group linked to the Socialist Party in England, which seems to be fairly small, publishing only a monthly paper and not claiming any great impact in the trade unions. It quit Syriza in 2011, apparently on a misjudged view that Syriza's support was waning. Now it seems to be reorienting to Syriza, focusing its agitation on the demand that Syriza adopt "a socialist programme". (The model must be Militant's agitation, year in year out until the late 1980s, for "Labour to power on a socialist programme").

The two socialist groups actually in Syriza derive from splinters from SEK. The larger one, DEA, is a regroupment of two ex-SEK splinters.

The splinters were generated by would-be "party-building"

contortions adopted by SEK under pressure from the SWP-Britain in 1993 and 2001. In the early 1990s the future DEA activists complained of "overoptimistic analysis of the period (decade of wars and revolutions, the 30s in slow motion)... organisational adventurism... indifference to the formation of members... political confusion". In 2001, of "revival of the 'things will automatically turn to the left' outlook... [a tendency to] underestimate the centrality of the working-class movement... diffusion into the 'movement'..."

In some ways it is paradoxical that DEA today finds itself integrated into Syriza, and hailing the possibilities for Syriza to move further left, while SEK is with Antarsya, bemoaning the 17 June election result as a shift of voters from the militant left to a supposedly hopelessly rightward-moving Syriza.

DEA is linked to the ISO-USA, and still reckons itself to be politically "in the tradition of" the SWP and the IS. It publishes a fortnightly paper and may have about 300 members.

The smaller one, Kokkino, came from a split in DEA over tactical issues, but now includes activists from different backgrounds, does not consider itself to be in the SWP "tradition", and has observer status with the Fourth International. It has 50 to 100 members and publishes a more-or-less monthly magazine. AWL members visiting Greece found what Kokkino members said acute and instructive.

Neither KKE, nor the reformist Synaspismos leadership of Syriza, is capable of leading the Greek working class to victory out of the great turbulence into which it is now flung.

The sudden rise of Syriza shows that working-class political allegiances have become fluid and malleable. There is scope for a Trotskyist-inspired revolutionary party to win hegemony.

That will not be achieved by the seven or so current Trotskyist groups all beavering away separately, making smaller gains here or slightly larger gains there.

The basic ideas of historical Trotskyism are vital. They need to be given force by a Trotskyist regroupment which also works out clear answers to the new questions posed by current issues. The axial questions now are:

how to relate to the existing workers' movement (unions, Syriza, KKE, neighbourhood groupings)

how to develop forms of local workers' self-organisation which can approximate the role of soviets (workers' councils), and:

how to integrate a Greek working-class strategy into a *European* (at least) working-class strategy capable of tackling the European and global scale of the capitalist crisis and capitalist strategies.

A left government in Greece? Lessons from Trotsky

By Theodora Polenta

Ideas from Trotsky's writings in the 1930s can help Marxists orient in Greece today.

A better model for an approach to Syriza than Greek far-left coalition Antarsya's approach of outright rejection, declaring the defeat of Syriza predetermined, and giving up on any battle to hold Syriza to its promises, would be Trotsky's proposal for the tasks of Belgian Marxists in relation to the reformist programme

of Belgian social-democracy in the mid-30s.

"First, to explain to the advanced workers the political meaning of the 'plan', that is, decipher the manoeuvres of the social-democracy at all stages; secondly, to show in practice to possibly wider circles of workers that insofar as the bourgeoisie tries to put obstacles to the realisation of the plan we fight hand in hand with the workers to help them make this experiment.

"We share the difficulties of the struggle but not the illusions. Our criticism of the illusions must, however, not increase the passivity of the workers and give it a pseudo-theoretic justification but on the contrary push the workers forward. Under these conditions, the inevitable disappointment with the 'Labor Plan' will not spell the deepening of passivity but, on the contrary, the going over of the workers to the revolutionary road".

"If we had to present a plan to the Belgian proletariat, this plan would have had an altogether different aspect. Unfortunately, the Belgian proletariat gave this mandate not to us but to the Belgian Labor Party [POB], and the plan reflects two facts: the pressure of the proletariat on the POB and the conservative character of this party...

"When we say to the masses that to realize this imperfect plan it is necessary to struggle to the end, we are far from covering up the deception; on the contrary, we are helping the masses to expose it by their own experience...

"The leaders of the POB do not want a struggle. But they are caught in the wheels of the crisis of capitalism and of reformism. They were forced to proclaim the plan and even to make of it the platform of the Belgian proletariat. It is a fact. What is our task? To help the workers to turn the wheels into which the opportunist leaders have been forced to thrust their hands".

Trotsky explained for Belgium why it would be idle fantasy to demand instead that the POB have a socialist programme.

"The revolutionary task consists in demanding that the POB take power in order to put its own plan into effect. Vereecken [a sectarian critic of Trotsky] replies to this: No!... the plan is no good... I, Vereecken, I will propose a better plan.

"Is this serious? No, it is ridiculous. Vereecken sets himself outside of reality. He constructs in his imagination a united front that does not exist in Belgium. For this imaginary united front he proposes an imaginary program, that is, Vandervelde [the POB] and Jacquemotte [the Belgian Stalinists] ought to fight together for the perfect plan dreamed up by Vereecken. In this way matters will be splendidly arranged..."

A similar approach in Greece would be to demand of Syriza that it carry through its programme, and at the same time explain to workers that the programme is deficient and workers need to take up other struggles too.

