Merry Crisis and a Happy New Fear

Repression and Resistance in Greece, December 2019

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Continuing our coverage of the struggle in Greece between the new repressive New Democracy government and the longstanding anarchist movement, we present the following report, drawing on eyewitness accounts from street mobilizations and the defense of several squats. The Greek state continues to throw its full weight behind an all-out assault on refugees, anarchists, and student movements, encouraging gratuitous police brutality against both human beings and their animal companions while seeking to exonerate right-wing murderers including members of the Neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn who faced conspiracy charges in the murder of Pavlos Fyssas and the police officer who murdered the 15-year-old anarchist Alexis Grigoropoulos 11 years ago this month.

We hope to inspire international solidarity actions with the movement in Greece and to equip readers for action and analysis in other contexts in an era in which state violence and grassroots resistance are escalating worldwide. The struggle continues.

An Update from an Ongoing Fight

This month the eviction of three inspiring squatted spaces in the Koukaki region of Athens has driven me to compose this urgent update. I aim to keep the struggle in Greece alive in international dialogue—not only in discussion but also in the actions taken to demonstrate international solidarity—in order to remind the Greek state that the foundation and spirit of our struggle goes beyond their borders and to keep this spirit strong and warm in such heinous and cold times.

Many things have happened since the last update; I will do my best to mention them. However, I want to start with the eviction of Koukaki.

The Eviction of the Koukaki Squats

At dawn on the morning of December 18, dozens of police from various agencies attacked the three squats in the Koukaki neighborhood, employing weapons including stun grenades and rubber bullets. These three occupations—45 Matrouzou Street, 21 Panetoliou Avenue, and Arvalis 3—were well-known and widely loved spaces helping to preserve an anarchist presence in one of the most expensive and rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in Athens. While some property owners in the neighborhood considered these spaces threatening, many Koukaki locals appreciated them for maintaining free clothing and food distribution projects and for maintaining a significant voice against Airbnb and similar capitalist efforts.

Located very close to the Acropolis with a predominantly upper-middle-class population, Koukaki has been one of the neighborhoods most impacted by Airbnb. The squats evicted represent immediate opportunities in real estate speculation; this may have helped to push their eviction to the top of the state's priorities.

Police invaded the two smaller squats (21 Panetoliou Avenue and Arvalis 3) following a short but courageous defense effort ending in four arrests at Panetoliou and two arrests at Arvalis. The arrestees were later released pending trial on charges including damage to property, disobedience, resisting arrest, and assault on an officer; in addition, police are attempting to use the same laws typically applied to gun possession to prosecute the arrestees after finding ordinary kitchen knives, bits of rock, and a crossbow on the premises.

One of the arrestees sustained a shot impact from a plastic bullet at close range and required two hospital visits during imprisonment. Despite this, the arrestees remain resilient. From inside the cells of Athens' main pre-trial prison, they managed to send out the following statement:

> Today, December 18, the state and its army attacked our community, evicting all three of our homes. Crowds of EKAM, Delta, and MAT scum assisted in the eviction of our homes. We were hit by a flash of lightning, and our companion was shot by a plastic bullet at close range. At the same time, neighbors of the M45 were beaten and tortured when they refused entry to the cops, as there was no public prosecutor. At the time of writing this text, we do not know where and how our companions from the occupation M45 are. This comes as part of a larger campaign to assault all those who resist power and fight for freedom. This is a time where the state is spreading its tentacles of repression against squats in order to meet the needs of tourists, replace permanent homes with Airbnb, and continue a violent campaign of gentrification. We do not recognize the notion of property and ownership that the state protects. We have used these empty buildings to foster a community of revolutionary desire, beauty, and the rejection of capitalism.
>
> Solidarity to the squats!
> We will spread across all the land!
> Power to everyone who resists state violence!
>
> Repression does not scare us, it persuades us to continue our struggle for a world of solidarity, equality, and self-organization.

[For background, Delta police are designated for beating demonstrators at close quarters; MAT police are riot squads; EKAM are Greece's SWAT and the most "organized" police department.]

Nearby, at 45 Matrouzou Street, a great battle took place in which people stood up to the state for an hour. Cops were covered in paint and faced a hailstorm of debris while blinded with the smoke of fire extinguishers. The police equate the protective measures those inside the squat took to defend themselves to attempts on the lives of the officers who attacked their home. These measures included reinforced doors, windows, and other typical security mechanisms. Any sensible person will recognize such measures as simple self-defense.

Amazingly, all the occupants of Matrouzou succeeded in escaping after this battle, despite all the forces and resources the state had mobilized against them. Embarrassed by this, the invaders punished the immediate neighbors.

Hoping to capture the escaped squatters, officers knocked on a neighbor's door, expecting to be welcomed. The mother of the household demanded that they present a warrant in order to enter; as she was requesting this, she heard other officers illegally entering her balcony and rooftop. When she and her husband demanded a warrant once again, the police beat her husband and their two sons, handcuffed them, put black bags put over their heads, and detained them in the cold outside on their roof. While the police did not present a warrant, they claimed they had done this with the supervision of the prosecutor in charge of the raids. The sons and father of the family were both arrested alongside the squatters from the other two occupations.

The police justified the brutality they inflicted on the family on the grounds that the family members were aiding the squatters in their escape. Yet in searching their home, the police found no evidence to support this claim. Grasping at straws, representatives of the state claim that they will test DNA found inside the squat and the DNA of the family members they arrested to prove there was a connection. An anonymous statement from Matrouzou following the raid claims that this family did not help them in any way. The father who was arrested also happens to be a prominent director who has received a lot of media attention. He has made his disdain for the police apparent, but his distance from the anarchist movement is also obvious.

The family has no formal connection to the squat, though they had witnessed the brutality involved in prior evictions, as the squat was also evicted in 2018—under Syriza—only to be re-occupied shortly after. In view of what they had already seen police do, it is not surprising that the family did not feel comfortable allowing police officers into their home if they were not legally obliged to do so.

Evidence of torture and brutality against the family is widely available via the mainstream media. The police continue to make conflicting statements, even claiming that the family members went for a gun—a desperate lie which has slowly disappeared from their narrative. Despite this, the father and sons are facing charges of resisting arrest and disrupting a police operation.

This assault on the neighbors has hit the mainstream press harder than the evictions themselves, in ways that are significant in light of Greek history and the current political polarization of Greece. Like police everywhere, Greek police perceive themselves to be heroes, regardless of how most people see them. Lacking maturity or self-awareness, they tend to lash out when rejected. So when a family that does not resemble the image of their target asserts that officers are not welcome without a warrant, they become aggressive. This incident has generated a dialogue reminiscent of the days of the Greek Junta.

Police have gone so far as to argue that the family's balconies and roof are public spaces, so they do not need to present a warrant to enter. Imagine what would happen if people tried to enter the pools on the roofs of the rich in the upscale neighborhood of Kolonaki! Much of the right-wing media is attempting to blame the woman for defying the police, regardless of the laws. We see this in a discussion between the mother and a condescending anchorman in which he explains that what the officers did was wrong, but it's actually her fault for defying their demands.

The polarization of Greece is playing out in the mainstream media. The proponents of the Junta whine that under the dictatorship "we slept with our doors open"—others joke that "we slept with our doors open because we didn't want to have to wake up to open them for police raids."

In any case, the three evicted spaces that provided a voice for the residents of Koukaki who celebrated community over profit are now boarded up with bricks. It is fortunate that many of the occupiers escaped; all of them demonstrated remarkable courage. They published a statement which is available below.[1]

While many of the non-human animals residing at the three occupations in Koukaki were also able to escape, it is unclear whether some of the cats that lived at Matrouzou remain boarded up inside. The police have taken to intentionally trapping animals inside evicted squats as a way to terrorize squatters; they did this during the eviction of the Vancouver squat on November 2. Considering that the residents of Matrouzou escaped, it is not surprising that police would contain animals inside the building until they die of hunger in hopes of luring the escapees into a trap or, failing that, tormenting them.

We should also mention that Dimitris Armakolas, the comrade who died in a tragic accident while raising a banner in solidarity with prisoner Marios Seisidis, was also a resident of the Koukaki squats before his passing.

Immediately after the eviction, a small solidarity demonstration took place. Police kettled the demonstrators, arresting five of them, then attacked the subsequent gathering at police headquarters to support the arrestees. That evening, after an emergency assembly, a sur-

[1] The following is an online statement of 45 Matrouzou St. regarding the escape and defense, entitled "From the Koukaki Occupation Community."

This is a statement by comrades who defended the Matrouzou 45 building and escaped the MAT, OPKE, and EKAM police forces of repression. While facing a police raid, we were informed to the fate of the other houses in our squatted community.

We immediately fortified the house and entered conflict with the forces of repression. Furniture, electrical appliances, boilers, paint, fire extinguishers, everything and anything in the house fell upon their heads. They responded by shooting and injuring us with plastic bullets as well as with stun grenades thrown directly into our home. We shouted "Here we live, here is our home, here we will die!"—"Fuck your development and Airbnb."

When they finally did get in, completely chaotic factors and a survival instinct offered an escape path. The memories that push us forward were awakened as inspiration by the forces of repression. These mercenaries could not accept that those who resisted them had escaped. We assume they were sad they couldn't catch us to beat and torture us. In response to this embarrassment, they turned to accuse random neighbors of arranging our escape. Like true mercenaries, the cops targeted the first house they found in front of them. They carried out an armed invasion, beating and capturing an entire family, concluding by arresting the father and both sons.

The state that claims to protect the institutionalized Greek family and the sanctity of private property lost their focused target. Not having captured those resisting, they took to beating people at random.

We send our respect to the woman and her family who refused to let the cops enter their home illegally, paying the price for their choices.

We send infinite love to our companions and to every person who supported us.

Solidarity with those arrested in the occupation of our community.

We may have lost all our belongings, we remain without clothes and shelter, they may have temporarily erased from the map three houses and three years of continuous and painstaking work for social solidarity and resistance; but we know they are afraid, our momentum and power is uncontrollable.

Solidarity with the occupation of the Villa Kouvelos and all squats.

Let the evictions of squatters become the reason for the escalation of the struggle on every social front.

prise mob appeared in the heart of Athens' shopping district in Monistraki, a well-known hang out of the rich and comfortable. While the beneficiaries of capital sipped their drinks, over 200 people marched disruptively through the area throwing flyers, painting graffiti on various stores, and smashing out the windows of a bank, a corporate grocery franchise, and a Starbucks. The police could not carry out any arrests and were forced to issue a public warning.

This action demonstrated that the movement does not only exist in squats and in Exarchia; it can arise and strike anywhere.

Targeting Animal Companions: A New Tactic of State Terror

As remarked, it is becoming a pattern for police to target the animal companions of squatters. This bears more comment.

In the Vancouver squat, for example, the squatters kept dogs and cats carefully separated in order to avoid the possibility of a violent dispute between the creatures. Signs on doors informed people of the dangers of letting certain dogs or cats out of the rooms they lived in. When the police raided Vancouver, they handcuffed and beat those who were defending the squat. While in handcuffs, one of the detainees begged officers to keep the animals apart for their safety. The officer replied by elbowing this person in the face. In spite of this person's requests, the cops intentionally placed the two dogs in the room occupied by four cats and closed the door—at a time when all of the animals were extremely distressed. One of the cats died as a consequence.

The closest companion of the cat who died learned of the death while inside prison. Absurdly, the cops claimed that the cat had been dead for two weeks, alleging that the squatters were lying in order to gain access to the squat again in order to reoccupy it. This broke the heart of the cat's closest companion, considering they had spent time together just recently.

Following the cat's death, animal control took the two dogs; the police threw the deceased cat in a dumpster and denied that the surviving three cats remained inside, claiming that no animals were left on the premises. Only after a bricklayer who was sealing up the entrances of the building was attacked by a cat to such an extent that it necessitated a visit to the hospital was anyone permitted to enter to search for the remaining cats. Then the state allowed animal welfare officials in for one hour, but they found only one of the three remaining cats. Vancouver is a very large building and cats are highly skilled at hiding, especially from police that they recognize as lethal antagonists.

Finally, with two cats remaining inside, an animal liberationist conducted a hunger strike outside Vancouver. At first, police attacked and threatened the hunger striker; when a prosecutor sent an order to allow for a proper search for the remaining cats, the police chief denied the request, claiming there were not enough police to safeguard the search—the same day that hundreds of police poured into Exarchia following an attack on a motorcycle belonging to a Delta cop. After a week of hunger strike and the spreading public accusation of animal cruelty, the cops finally gave in and allowed people to find and release the

remaining cats. According to comrades from Vancouver, if not for the mainstream attention resulting from a social media campaign to get the cats out, they are certain that the prosecutor would have never called for their release. It is all too easy to torture and kill the voiceless in order to torment those with more "rights."

Shortly after the raid of Vancouver, in the course a string of raids against the group Revolutionary Self-Defense, police raided a home in Exarchia. The cops found nothing to charge the residents with. The cops conducting the raid were the same ones who had attacked Vancouver. Leaving in frustration, they attacked a cat that lived there, breaking the cat's front legs and smashing the cat's jaw. When asked what they were doing, one responded, "Are you gonna do a hunger strike too?"

In another home invasion in the same string of anti-terror raids, officers kidnapped all the dogs on the premises—apparently for no reason other than to cause pain to their human companions.

Police in the United States often murder animals—for example, shooting dogs; maybe this news will not surprise many readers. But it is important to record the brutal cowardice of the police carrying out these evictions and to emphasize that the free hand that New Democracy has given them amplifies the cruelest and most sordid aspects of humanity.

Coddling Golden Dawn

Meanwhile, the state prosecutor has suggested dismissing conspiracy charges against the Neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in the case of the 2013 murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas, aka Killah P, while at the same time charging two individuals for alleged attacks against the offices of Golden Dawn. Such attacks have happened repeatedly in the last few years, usually claimed anonymously by communiqués signed with the names of victims of Golden Dawn—for example, the Pavlos Fyssas brigade and the Sahzat Luqman brigade. (Sahzat Luqman was a Pakistani laborer murdered by members of Golden Dawn.) According to corporate media, police allege the suspects to be linked to a November 1 attack on Golden Dawn's office on Deligianni Street in downtown Athens as well as an earlier attack on May 23 in the West Attica area of Acharnes. Both attacks used makeshift explosives that damaged the premises but caused no injuries.

If the state allegations are pushed forward, it is likely that the prosecution will attempt to charge the two under new anti-terror measures, with the possible result that both of them could receive longer sentences than any of the murderers convicted for killings Golden Dawn has perpetrated, not to mention all the Golden Dawn murders that have never even been investigated. If Killah P had not been a white Greek citizen, his case likely would have never have made headlines—a tragic reality in Greece and around the world.

To the surprise of many people, the two arrestees were not remanded into custody on the day of their arraignment. Typically in cases involving terrorism, the state will hold those accused until their trial. Most likely, they are being allowed to await trial outside of jail as a result of a calculated effort by the state to moderate outrage. In view of widespread domestic and even international outrage against police brutality in Greece and the outcome

of the Golden Dawn conspiracy case, the theatre of Greek politics will appear to remain in accordance with the laws of neoliberal democracy. But despite the flimsy evidence, the two comrades still have to report to the police four times a month and pay 15,000 euro bail, and they cannot travel abroad until the trial begins. If their case proceeds as others have, their trial could be delayed for years—using bureaucracy to punish the unconvicted.

It is not a coincidence that the state is dropping the conspiracy charges against Golden Dawn while cracking down on their enemies. New Democracy attempted to distance themselves from Golden Dawn during the elections, but they continue to make it clear that they are allies of the openly fascist group, even if somewhat wealthier and better mannered. When Killah P's mother left the courtroom after the conclusion of the prosecution at the end of six years of traumatizing trial, she said "Today, you have stabbed Pavlos."

Now Golden Dawn stands to be awarded 8 million euros as compensation for the case. This is a substantial amount of money in Greece for a political group. Political parties in Greece's parliament are entitled to state funding. However, when the trial began six years ago, the state froze this funding. If Golden Dawn receives this large sum at once now, we will no doubt see them attempt to make up for their recent setbacks in the 2019 elections; it will also dramatically increase the resources available to support fascist street violence.

As an anarchist, I never expect justice from the state. I won't use my limited voice to demand that anyone be imprisoned, not even fascist murderers. However, it is necessary to point out that a great deal of evidence was presented in the case against Golden Dawn. Beyond the obvious evidence of their Nazi connections and politics, investigators presented an array of intercepted phone calls and messages in the court, as well as written instructions explicitly organizing fascist violence. In view of the hierarchical organization of Golden Dawn, it's very difficult to imagine that autonomous actions would take place without the approval of higher party members. Despite this, all 65 accused members of the conspiracy were acquitted of their charges. Only the individuals accused of actually stabbing Killah P will face any punishment, despite the large number of Golden Dawn members who coordinated throughout the neighborhood to converge on him, threatened him, surrounded him, and attacked him on the night he was murdered.

December 6

Now let's back up and start earlier, to cover what else has happened this month.

From November 20, when the government announced that it would evict all squats, until the deadline of December 5 that they set for the occupiers to gain legalization or vacate, squats across Greece organized daily events and coordinated demonstrations across the country to show the strength of our movements and solidarity.

On the day of the deadline, anonymous comrades reclaimed 15 new squats across Athens to be used if existing squats were evicted. Anarchists also boarded up an office of New Democracy with bricks the same way they have assaulted our spaces. This is one of many recent actions against the offices of New Democracy across the country.

On December 6, demonstrations took place across Greece in memory of Alexis Grigoropoulos, the 15-year-old murdered by police in 2008, and the insurrection that followed; Greek anarchists have observed this date for ten years now. Clashes occurred in Patras and Thessaloniki.

In the morning of December 6, an autonomous demonstration of anarchist students set out, surrounded on all sides by the police and isolated from other left demonstrators. This clearly illustrated which movement the state recognizes as a threat to its power. That night, a huge demonstration marking the anniversary of the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos took place with thousands of anarchists attending.

At the end of the demonstration, many took small actions, destroying advertisements on bus stations, pelting banks and state offices with paint bombs, and attempting to remove the barricades at universities, which are aimed at preventing public use of campuses. While these actions were fairly limited, once the demonstrators began to make their way back to Exarchia, where the memorial to Alexis is, without provocation or direct confrontation against the cops, police attacked brutally, beating people at random. Video footage shows the violence; even the state has been forced to pretend to investigate its own brutality, though we can be sure this will come to nothing.

One of the important pieces of evidence is a video showing police beating an unarmed man screaming "I surrender." While they beat many people that night, this video caught mass attention not only due to the cowardly assaults carried out by officers, but also because, intent on humiliating him, they were stripping him of his clothing. This, too, has become a common police tactic aimed at humiliating arrestees and detainees, reported by many individuals who have been kidnapped by the riot police around the center of Athens. It is reminiscent of the kidnappings and torture done under Greece's Junta.

One reporter from a mainstream television station was compelled to comment on the brutality live on the air on the night of December 6. A reporter from the mainstream channel Kontra couldn't help reacting to the beating he witnessed of a person filming with a phone near the events. The reporter said, "People were beaten for truly doing nothing," and that if he hadn't had a professional camera crew, he would have been beaten as well. Shocking many people, he added that "While many take to the streets, we must chant the chant that unites us all: 'cops, pigs, murderers.'"

Dozens were arrested across the country on ridiculous allegations by the state. A deliveryman delivering food near the assault by police was beaten and arrested; while he was identifying himself, police asked him why he was running. All arrestees have been released and are currently awaiting trial.

At the same time as the demonstration in Athens, people carried out clandestine actions outside of Exarchia in thirteen other Athenian neighborhoods. Communiqués claim that people attacked approximately thirty state and capitalist targets in solidarity with the spirit of the day and against new state measures.

As of now, the deadline for squats to seek legalization has passed. All remaining squatted social centers and residences are in open war with the government. Yet our solidarity and the spirit of the anarchist movement here is rooted too deeply to be vulnerable to any material attack they could make on anarchist infrastructure.

Numerous counterattacks have taken place since the last update. People have targeted expensive cars specifically in affluent neighborhoods to remind those benefiting from the displacement of anarchists and immigrants that they are not safe. The movement is getting hit hard, but we are not out of action. On the contrary, many more people have passionately woken up.

The Eviction of Kouvelos Squat

On December 17, 2019, police evicted the Villa Kouvelos squat in Marousi, a northern district of Athens, in the early morning hours.

The empty and dilapidated building was occupied by anarchists in April 2010 and rapidly renovated it into a regionally-known social center that enriched the district with concerts, lectures, discussions, and political events. The neighborhood of Marousi is known more as a bland middle-class district of Athens. Kouvelos was important to many youth as a safe place to explore revolutionary ideas.

Being close to one of the offices of Golden Dawn, the squat was a frequent target of fascist attacks. However, many locals in the surrounding neighborhood appreciated Kouvelos as a friendly and safe space offering an alternative to Marousi's bland normalcy. As of now, there remains no fabricated reason for the eviction—there are no plans to use the building or sell the land. The eviction was most likely prioritized because state officials perceived it to be an easy operation on account of its location.

When the cops began the evacuation, at 7:30 am, many local residents gathered outside to voice their opposition to the operation and solidarity for the occupation. Later that day, a demonstration of 300+ people took place in Marousi, smashing many banks and spraying graffiti for Kouvelos around the neighborhood.

The weekend after the evacuation, a spontaneous demonstration of 300+ anarchists converged in Marousi to re-enter Kouvelos. They asserted the resilience of our movements, hung a banner, and reclaimed the squat for a period of time, during which they surveyed the damage done by the EKAM (Greek SWAT police), documented the investigations police were carrying out (such as marked DNA samples), and noted what will be needed in order to fully re-occupy the squat in the near future.

Exiting the squat, the demonstration took the streets, attacking some local corporate franchises and the metro station of Marousi, where the glass turnstiles were smashed. While the participants had not intended to battle the police, riot police attacked the march, and demonstrators defended themselves against asphyxiating tear gas and riot police assaults. During the demonstration, some people identified an undercover police officer taking pictures and video of the demonstrators. A demonstrator confronted him and punched him.

In response, corporate media outlets flexed their muscles of deception. Due to the perceived old age of the undercover officer, media claimed that anarchists attacked an old man wearing a hearing aid without reason. Quickly, it became clear that the hearing aid was actually a device to communicate with other officers and the supposedly old man was an active-duty police officer. However, the press turned this lie into prime time news, solely

focusing on the footage, playing the attack on the cop over and over again and purposefully neglecting to remind viewers of the original point of the demonstration.

Still, an action like this occurring with so much strength in a neighborhood such as Marousi underscores the resilience of our movements. Those resisting on behalf of Kouvelos emphasize that the squat will be re-occupied, stating that their revolutionary desires will outweigh any campaign of repression.

No Gentrification for Christmas

Leading up to Christmas, the state has also targeted Exarchia Square with surreal efforts to “normalize” the area. Police raided and surrounded the square to hose down the sidewalk and install a Christmas tree. The tree was burned twice the first day. The police did the same thing the next day; the tree was burned again. These highly symbolic efforts to “clean up” the area indicate the way the state hopes to use Exarchia to send a message to its base. On top of this, the Mayor of Athens is discussing organizing state events in the square. If this happens, the festivities will only take place surrounded by the police who protect them; the real point is to provoke the defenders of Exarchia and to send a message to those who never go there that the state has recaptured it.

The burning of the Christmas tree recalls the famous event during the 2008 insurrection when demonstrators burned the iconic Christmas tree in front of the Greek parliament to convey a willingness to continue fighting even as many Greeks returned to their villages for holiday festivities.

Advancing Technology in Repression

The Greek state is also continuing efforts to modernize its surveillance methods. While they have always been open about their ability to monitor classic phone and SMS conversations, they are looking to move forward in the digital world, openly mentioning their efforts to get consulting in the UK for the purposes of investigating Viber and Whatsapp users. This effort to collaborate with foreign tech-spy agencies follows the formal incorporation of drone technology into Greek policing.

Further Attacks on Refugees

While all this plays out, New Democracy is hurrying to meet its promise to relocate 20,000 refugees to mainland Greece. They aim to move refugees off islands such as Lesvos and further from the public eye. Over 50,000 refugees remain in camps on various Aegean islands across the water from Turkey, in conditions so appalling that NGOs and human rights groups have publicly called out the state for them. Local fascists frequently attack these camps. The numbers in these camps are slowly increasing again as more immigrants arrive

in Greece. However, the government passed new laws to limit and deter asylum requests in November; they aim to define refugees as migrants in order to weaken the standards of protection that are due to them. Additional new measures to slow the already drawn-out asylum procedure have gone into effect in order to deter refugees from following proper procedure as a way to lower the acceptance rates of asylum requests.

Alongside all these measures, new cuts will go into effect in 2020 that will leave refugees without the support programs that have helped them to survive; they will be expected to fend for themselves during their application processing. The existing support programs were never enough to begin with; in many cases, a refugee awaiting asylum was expected to survive on 150 euros a month, while being unable to seek legal employment. Now they will face even worse challenges.

All these measures are intended to deter refugees and immigrants from coming to Greece and to torture those who already live here, having made the daring journey across the Aegean Sea. If people are pushed to work illegally, or forced to steal to eat, or if they travel abroad hoping for better opportunities, all of these are grounds that can be used to reject their applications and deport them.

This month, heinous overcrowding and institutional degradation set off an inspiring uprising on Samos Island, a short distance from Turkey. According to No Borders, a refugee camp on this island originally designed for 650 people is housing 8000. That means roughly one toilet per 300 people and one shower per 500 people. Camps like this are spread across other islands near Turkey. This month, residents of the camp came together to spark an uprising against the police. Facing tear gas and brutality by local riot forces, they demonstrated their humanity despite a terrible situation and harsh winter. This follows another uprising in October, when a massive fire necessitated the eviction of the over-crowded camp. Both uprisings have resulted in the shutting down of schools and other major institutions on the island. Riots and resistance in these camps are ongoing; they account for some of the reasons the new government prefers to move them out of sight rather than being forced to meet the demands of the migrants.

In Conclusion

Entering the holiday season, we wish to bring to mind the hunger strike of political prisoner Kostas Sakkas, a Greek anarchist charged with belonging to a terrorist group and with aggravated possession of weapons after his arrest at a warehouse. He is accused of participating in the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire, though both he and the CCF deny this. Throughout his imprisonment, he has conducted frequent hunger strikes. His hunger strikes became so frequent and so effective under the prior administration that they considered releasing him under the same bill that led to the release of anarchist prisoner Nikos Romanos. New Democracy has dismissed his struggle, suggesting that “the law should never apply to anarchist terrorists” while using that same law to release the murderer of Alexis Grigoropoulos as soon as they took power.

Many of Sakkas's hunger strikes have been aimed at winning the option to work or gain access to education. His most recent hunger strike was intended to compel the government to transfer him from the Nigrita prison in northern Greece to Korydallos prison in Athens in order that he could be closer to his family. After going into a hypoglycemic shock and facing other life-threatening health issues, he won his demand and will be transferred to Korydallos prison. His courage should be an inspiration to us all.

May the names of fallen comrades, such as Alexis Grigoropoulos, and those struggling behind bars, such as Kostas Sakkas, resound around the world during this cold time of the year. May our struggles demonstrate that our passion for freedom is stronger than any prison, inspiring others to connect their struggles with ours.

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