

December 2008, Greece: An attempt to detect the power and the limits of our struggle

‘From borders to police departments, democracy murders’ (slogan on a wall)

Although the state and the spectacle attempted to reduce the events of December 2008 to “riots by youngsters” whose inherent in their age sensitivity justifies their reaction against grown-ups’ world, these events are the most important *historical* ones during the last 35 years in Greece. In December a minority of the working class that lives in this little corner of the world rebelled. Through its actions, it criticised contemporary social relations, labour, commodity, state. This destructive and at the same time creative critique was anti-capitalist and not reformative; it expressed the need for overcoming capitalist relations.

“Remember, remember the 6th of December” was a slogan on a wall in Athens. From that night onward, the actions of a mass of young (but not only) proletarians spoke: attacking cops and police departments, setting banks on fire, destroying and looting department stores, vandalising ministries, occupying universities, town halls and other public buildings. Attacks against expensive stores started from the very first night; the link between the murder of the 15-year-old boy and capital’s arrogance was directly and explicitly stated. Attacks against car agencies, traffic lights, bus stops, that is, aspects of *circulation* in the city, regularly took place. Attacks against banks, which symbolise and territorialise within urban space money dominance over people’s needs, were fierce; during the first days of the uprising there were always attempts to set them on fire.

At streets, there were school kids, among them several second generation immigrants, university students, young workers and unemployed, locals and immigrants, “lumpen” proletarians and few “stable” workers. As world capitalist crisis unfolded, the rebellion showed “*young people’s profound understanding that their future has been looted in advance*” (as Mike Davis said in an interview for a Greek daily paper¹). It wasn’t a movement against police brutality or repression. The fact that repression was the target of proletarian attack can be understood, if we see an unimportant cop’s shot as what it really is: the expression of a state intervening in an increasingly disciplinary way against proletariat, whose reproduction is all the more difficult to take place in *today’s* capitalist world. Also, it wasn’t a movement against government. Insurgents’ actions, having today’s shitty life as their starting point², moved against the future of capitalist world.

It’s important to examine the way the particular urban geography of Athens city center contributed to the coming together of different parts of the proletariat during the revolt, when the wall between the district of the “permanently rebelled” and that of the immigrants was broken. Patision Boulevard played once more its historical role, that of the class struggles boulevard. It is set in a geographic triangle, whose edges correspond to three worlds. Exarchia constitute the

¹ See <http://masablogg.blogspot.com/2009/01/mike-davis-on-greek-revolt.html>

² “*Let’s take revenge not only for Alexis’ death, but also for thousands of hours stolen from us at work; for thousands of moments we’ve felt humiliated in boss’ office; for thousands of moments we’ve swallowed our anger against a cool fucking customer! For our dreams that have become advertisements; for our ideas that have become governmental lines and votes; for our constantly worsening life; for our very selves, whom we witness slowly becoming shadows in a repeating everyday life*”. From a text written by two workers in a mall in Athens.

territorialisation of *an ongoing 'low-intensity civil war'* [that] *seems to have long characterised the relationship between police and various strata of youth* (Mike Davis). It's the district of anti-culture and several forms of subculture, as well as the area where a circulation and fermentation of radical (or not so much) political ideas take place. It looks like the "Galatians village" within the metropolis of commodity and security. Historically, it has been the "workshop" of subversive behaviours and a terrain of intense social conflicts. In recent years, the immigrants' district, which is located around Omonia Sq. and Peiraius Str., constitutes the place where the most degraded parts of the multinational proletariat gather. On the third edge, there is the Ermou Str.-Syntagma Sq.-Kolonaki district zone. These are the areas of wealth and state power; the fact that they are located next to the outcasts and the undisciplined is provocative. The proximity of these areas, due to the Greek state's inability to apply a policy of "upgrading" and sterilising the city center (unlike in many European metropolises), creates an inflammable mixture, which blew up in December. During the outbreak, different aspects of reactions against depreciation and precarisation of life met each other. That's why the revolt was diffused, the fire spread and threatened to burn a big part of the country. While the state was begging for peaceful and symbolic protests, rioters were looking for state buildings around their neighbourhoods to occupy or attack. They were trying by every means to declare that the enemy is everywhere.

'We are an image from the future' (slogan on a wall)

December is of historical importance, because the actions which constitute it create the need for overcoming the content of the proletarian critique of the world. December *is* the current crisis of the reproduction of capitalist relation, since the composition and the actions of the insurgents are indicative of the dead end of capitalist society. The insurgents, no matter what capital calls them (school or university students, young precarious workers, immigrants), are the proletarians whose future capital doesn't seem willing to guarantee. Their "no future" situation threatens the rest of the proletariat and capital relation itself at the same time.

The destructive actions of December were socialised and diffused. If it was historically possible for these actions to continue and expand, then the question of abolishing capital by the proletariat would be put forward. In this sense, December *showed* the potentiality of abolishing capital in the future; it constituted the rupture with the historical past of class struggles. The abolition of capital, that is the abolition of classes, *therefore* the abolition of the proletariat *as well*, and the production of new immediate social relations among individuals is communism. The production of the new world is *out of necessity* the result of the destruction of the old one. Here lies the image from the future that December bore within itself: only the destruction of buildings, means of production, distribution networks, every situation and place that preserves capital, is able to create the conditions of the necessity for communism. Only when everyday activity will be inseparable from insurrectionary activity, will there be the opportunity for the abolition of classes, that is, the abolition of labour and value. Only through the destruction of urban space, the division of time between work and other activities as well as the division of space between that of production and reproduction are possible to be questioned. As Marx wrote in Grundrisse in the 19th century: "*Relations between individuals are fixed in things, because exchange value is by nature material*". The abolition of value will necessarily start from the destruction of things. When this destruction is generalised to the point that the proletariat will have to find the way to live without being proletariat any longer, only then will the potentiality of communism arise. Communism isn't "appropriating public places" or "distributing to everyone" the products *that*

have been produced within capital or “self-managing” the factories *which cannot be but places where value is produced*. The same way it cannot be *only* “violence”, “confronting the state” or “destroying buildings”. *The new relations are the generalisation of the communist measures* to be taken because they *are necessary for both struggle and life continuation*. Communisation is the connection of all the communist practices which result from the needs of the conflict with capital, and their generalisation up to the point that makes retreat impossible. The historical outcome of this procedure is communism: not “self-managing the production”, but the abolition of the division of life between production and reproduction. Not “appropriating public places”, but the abolition of the divisions the urban space imposes. The December revolt pointed towards the future, but it stopped. After the revolt, the content of the class struggle was transformed and returned to revindication³. In the course of proletarian struggles, when survival isn’t identified with the continuation of the struggle against all forms of capital, the capital relation is certainly transformed anew, but these struggles are condemned to be defeated maintaining their rights within capital. Communisation isn’t the defense of an alternative way of organisation of life; communisation doesn’t defend; *it goes on*. Communisation is but the critique of revolution itself, that is, revolution against its deceleration (which is counter-revolution); revolution within revolution.

‘Back to normality? Not even if you shoot us’ (slogan on a wall)

An account of the December revolt, if the abolition of capital is the matter, has to examine *what* the proletarians of all genders *did*, which *the limits* of their actions were and what they *are capable of doing* in the future.

The actions that pointed towards the new world, despite their contradictions, were *the attacks against buildings and stores and looting commodities*, the *anti-union practice* manifested in GSEE occupation and the wild *attacks* of school kids against *police departments*. These actions are important, because they are not revindicative. Equally important was the considerable *participation of immigrants*, which indicates that divisions among proletarians are questioned only when the struggle is *against* capital. We’ll deal with “anti-authoritarian/anarchist milieu’s” role, due to its special contribution to the movement of December, as well as with the issue of social violence, because of its special significance. Both the historical limit of the December revolt and its future perspectives are dealt with separately at the last part of the text.

‘They ruin our lives; we’ll ruin everything to take our lives in our hands’ (slogan on a wall)

Insurgent proletarians put forward no demands, claimed nothing, since “*they experience everyday and therefore are aware of the refusal of the ruling class to meet any such demands*”, a leaflet from the occupied ASOEE said. The days of December made clear that capitalist crisis is also a crisis of politics. Insurgents destroyed or occupied state buildings, that is, the buildings of the collective capitalist and mechanism of social reproduction, with which they would seek to

³ According to Endnotes (see issue #1, endnotes.org.uk) ‘revindicate’ is an archaic word in English meaning ‘to demand’. Endnotes writes “*Luttes revindicative is a common French term meaning struggles over wages and conditions, or struggles over immediate demands (as opposed to insurrectionary or political struggles)*”. We use in this English translation of our text the terms “revindicative struggles” and “struggles over immediate demands” in the same way.

compromise in a revindicative struggle. Their attacks against public buildings *were* the absence of demands. “*This absence of reform demands (and, thus, any conventional handle for managing the protests), of course, is what is most scandalous, not the Molotov cocktails or broken shop windows*”, Mike Davis said in this same interview.

The non-negotiatory character of December constitutes the *rupture* with the massive and long lasting student movement of 2006-07, which is the historical background of the revolt. Back then a specific part of young proletarians, university students, rebelled, which is of great social importance in Greece⁴. It was a movement against the blocking of the reproduction of the (future) skilled labour force. But the student movement was a revindicative struggle (it demanded for the skilled workers a better position in the labour market), despite the contradictions and conflicts within it. Being a part of that movement and facing its weakness to be expanded outside the university, we believed that specific demands could constitute a *political tool of questioning the divisions within the working class*. As we were experiencing -each one of us in a different way- the attack against the conditions of our reproduction (an essential aspect of capitalist restructuring), we believed that the demand for a “social wage” would play that role and thus we particularised it in the movement as a demand for a wage for schoolwork. This demand was one of those which expressed the opposition of the working class against capital’s tendency, in the present historical period, to reduce indirect wage by cutting down social benefits and pushing all the more towards the immediate subordination of the reproduction of labour power to the wage relation. We aimed to stress that the activities of the unwaged parts -for different reasons each- of the working class is *work*, in a sense that capital relation is reproduced. Therefore, we thought that the demand for “social wage”, by posing the issue of improving the position of students, unemployed and housewives, and generally all those being outside the labour market, would result in our capability, *all the waged workers together*, to question capital relation from a better position. Thus, we tried to put it forth inside the movement as *a subversive demand*; it’s a contradiction which only after December we were able to understand. Only a small radical part of the student movement responded positively to this demand. The December revolt made us see the reason why. The fragmentation of the proletariat has a historical character and thus we can’t face it *only* as weakness or defeat of working class; the same way we can’t face the previous historical situation of the working class, that is, the previous form of capital, as victory. Proletariat, after the defeat of the struggles of the period 1960-1970 and the counter-revolution, has been segmented into *necessarily* antagonistic categories of waged or unwaged parts, since the generalised condition that prevails in the labour market is *precarity*. But, the generalisation of precarity cannot lead to “the unity of precarious workers”, since the consequences of precarity and mostly the difficulty in their reproduction as workers, affirm the already existing decomposition of workers identity, which does derive from time and space fragmentation of production that capital restructuring has brought about. However, capitalism is the *relation between two classes* and the problem of the reproduction the working class is capital’s problem as well. The December revolt was the *experienced critique* of that viewpoint of ours, since it showed us that fragmentation isn’t questioned through demands which affirm the proletarian condition of the previous historical period; today, it is able to be questioned necessarily only at the moment of insurrection: during

⁴ On the one hand, because of the particular state’s management of employment and unemployment of young people after the end of the military coup, in which -due to the lack of an advanced industrial sector in Greece- university played a major role. On the other hand, because of the 35-year-old history of student struggles, which preserved a constant educational crisis.

the practical critique of capital relation itself, namely the critique of proletarians' existence as labour power.

The absence of demands *was* the prevalence of the informal form of organisation at streets, that of groups of friends or gangs. There were no official calls to protests; during the first days, demonstrations in the city centers provided simply the necessary space for the gathering of insurgent proletarians' destructive wills. This was depicted in the wild simplicity of the banners merely writing "Murderers!", while the (very few) banners of political or union organisations expressed their need to distance themselves from the so-called "blind" and "without orientation" violence. Rioters organised their actions on the basis of their immediate relations (relations that were extended beyond the already existing relations among pals) and the mutual desire for concrete action. Since such unofficial groupings do not have bureaus, do not publish political brochures and do not keep records, they are condemned to get lost in the anonymity of history and as a result it is difficult for their actions to be recorded. They are the groups of provocateurs whose actions cannot be controlled by the parties, they are the voices inventing an original slogan, and they are the elements that constitute the collective subject of "the hooded". Unofficial groups of friends do not take responsibility for their actions, because they are not interested in gaining political benefits; they are the surprising presence playing the dominant role in an event which disappears afterwards. From second generation immigrants to anti-authoritarian/anarchist collectives, which at street act more as gangs rather than political organisations, due to the immediate relations among their members, unofficial groupings were the undisputed protagonists as far as organisation is concerned during the first days of the December revolt.

The prevalence of those groups as a form of organisation resulted in something very specific: despite its efforts, the state didn't find any representatives of the insurgents and mostly it didn't manage to construct any, in order to control the movement. In every movement over immediate demands there is that kind of organisation which expresses its limits. For example, a strike is organised by a union or even a militant section of the workers outside it. Both these forms take up the role to ensure that workers will return to work (sometimes against a minority which doesn't want to). Correspondingly, a protest over a specific demand is organised by a party or a political milieu, whose role is first of all to define the demand, that is, to define what is at stake in relation to this specific demand and then define the content and the time of victory or defeat, that is, the end of the struggle. On the case of December, there were various recuperators who, next to those who fully condemned the revolt, tried to persuade that only political protest and demands can bear benefits and not the so-called "blind" violence, which despite its blindness, as even leftists admitted, aimed at capitalist targets. However, the operation of mediation remained unsuccessful, since the insurgents were against any mediators and they acted, rejecting their role, as if there wasn't any material benefit for them in capitalism.

'Up against the wall motherfuckers! We've come for what's ours...' (a leaflet title)

As in all recent proletarian rebellions (there are many examples: Watts '65, Detroit '67, Bologna '77, Los Angeles '92, Albania '97, Argentina 2001, France 2005), in Greece during December too, proletarians appropriated what became available in the chaos the riots created. Lootings took place mostly in Athens, less in Thessaloniki and even less in provincial cities. Together with the absence of demands, they were the most scandalous aspect of December. Journalists and political mediators of all kinds could for some time "justify" and tolerate with the attacks against police and vandalisms, but not this proletarian assault against private property. Nevertheless, when

promises of consumption happiness are ungrudgingly handed out by the spectacle while the means to meet those promises are taken away from proletarians, nothing is more natural than direct appropriation.

Immigrants played a major role in lootings during December, but they were not alone. In many cases, pupils, students, but also older Greek proletarians took advantage of the 100% discount offered by state's inability to protect private property. Of course, the state and media attempted to divide rioters between Greek-demonstrators and immigrant-looters. For a lot of immigrants in Athens, that was how they participated in the revolt, since they had the opportunity, with the police being busy, to appropriate commodities from stores in their neighbourhoods. In at least two cases, dozens of them suddenly came out of nowhere and looted stores in a commercial street. In other cases, lootings took place behind barricades, in areas temporarily liberated from the police. The important thing is that in Athens cases of looting appeared immediately after the cop's shooting, during the first day of the revolt; from the next day lootings took place in Thessaloniki as well. A wide variety of commodities were appropriated: food and other emergency goods (medicines, furniture, clothing, fuel), but also luxury goods, some of which would be sold. In some cases, cash machines were attacked, although unsuccessfully. People "employed in the crime sector" took the opportunity to carry out organised attacks against jewelry and other luxury stores. In several cases, after looting, rioters destroyed stores and commodities which hadn't been appropriated. This way their fiesta was understood as completed. Their actions declared that: they use commodities (deprived from their exchange value, in most cases) today, yet they don't want shops to exist tomorrow.

As any communist measure not being generalised, looting is also a contradictory practice. The damage done to the commodity relation by appropriating commodities from broken shop windows remains partial. The commodity relation finally survives in the private possession or in the re-selling of the loots. In both cases, the revolt confronts its limits. Appropriated goods do not become *useful* for the immediate relations among social individuals, but *use values* for each independent individual or each separate community. We don't know what exactly happened inside immigrants' communities. We can imagine for sure that some days off were celebrated, since selling the appropriated goods temporarily eliminated the obligation to work. We can also imagine feasts with stolen meat and drinks and noisy gatherings to watch football games in front of the "new" TV set and the "brand stolen" table onto which the TV lies and no more standing still around newsstands and groceries which "offer TV" at Victoria square. But these feasts are incomplete; they are the return to normality. Of course, there were cases of "thieves" sharing stolen goods, but they were very few and did not become generalised. This practice was not a necessity for surviving but rather a rioting fiesta. The practice of looting will be really liberating only when it reaches its final destination: the re-appropriation of our looted by capital future.

'These days belong to Alexis' (slogan on a wall)

It was when school kids entered the clashes, on Monday morning December 8 that the unrest was upgraded and spread in the suburbs of Athens and a great many small provincial cities and towns. Second generation immigrant school kids as well participated in the wild attacks against numerous police stations. Due to state's inability to apply a fully separating educational policy (Greek and immigrant kids often share the same desk) and the absence of a planned urban ghettoisation of immigrants similar to that in French cities, this generation of immigrants interacts

with native students all the more, as living conditions of natives and immigrants converge. This explains to a great extent their coming together during the December unrest.

Of all people, school kids were the ones who mostly felt the assassination of the 15-year-old kid as an assassination of *one of them*. It is clear that these kids are very well aware of what their future will be. The statements of the murderer cop's attorney about the kid's rightful death, as well as the very choice by the state of this particular person as the murderer's defender, represent an official state's statement: integration is now achieved in repressive/disciplinary terms. The fact that every proletarian's life is at risk is now normality. Apart from pressure by the family, school kids experience the intensified operation of disciplining and rationalising the selection/exclusion mechanisms (law "against hoods", attack against youth subcultures and constant police harassment in the streets, a series of educational laws or legislative proposals - some recent examples: in order for someone to enter the university the grade of 10 is now necessary; also, there is a proposal for compulsory conscription at the age of 18). The most recent expressions of the unrest in the educational system are the 2006-07 student movement and primary school teachers' 6-week strike; one of their effects was the re-emergence after 2006 of the "usual" school occupations, which in many occasions have no specific demands⁵; school kids declare that they don't like being students and by occupying their schools they indirectly shorten the length of the school year.

The certain school kids' practice during the revolt announces the reproduction crisis of capitalist system. Greek school kids (regardless of the working class stratum they come from) are persuaded that their living conditions will be worse than their parents'. *The future workers/unemployed*, knowing that they are going to be the fully dispensable labour power *in the future*, reject during the revolt their student role *in the present*. During the first days of the revolt, school kids were wandering in groups in the center and various neighbourhoods and suburbs of the cities, really *seeking for* the police; when they met them they would attack until they were exhausted. They would stand with audacity in a really short distance from the cops, risking being arrested or beaten up. They were really *uncontrollable*. The absence of demands was expressed in the disastrous outburst against police stations, an "upgraded" practice compared to occupying school buildings. It might be the case that the combination of the total absence of demands and the intensity of violence against the state during the first days of the revolt is the reason why school occupations did not spread afterwards. Since school kids' actions didn't expand and weren't generalised, their impulse withdrew and thus it was difficult for them to return to the traditional practice of "cutting class", after all they had carried out outside school.

'These days are ours, too' (from a leaflet by the Haunt of Albanian Migrants)

The coming together of Greek precarious proletarians and immigrants in the revolt -the latter being the ones who capital imposes precarity on in the most brutal way- was the overcoming of national, racial and religious divisions, which had emerged in France during 2005 and 2006; this advancement was of great historical significance. The first generation of Balkan immigrants, who have been in Greece since the early '90s, did not take part in the revolt; generally speaking, these immigrants have been integrated -to some degree- into Greek society.

⁵ School occupations without demands had been a common practice during the '90s, after the great student movement of 1990-91. This school kids' pleasant habit stopped at the end of the decade, because of the state's counter-attack through the education restructuring of 1998. Though temporarily, as it was proved.

They were destined to substitute the deficient welfare state (they undertook part of the reproductive work, such as infants and elders nursing, at a very low cost) while capital was attacking local proletarians' direct and indirect wage; in addition, being paid petit wages, they were used as a tool for pressure against the whole Greek working class. They are to a great extent employed in the "unofficial" labour market, which provides them with a minimum income for getting by and perhaps better living conditions than the ones they used to have in their countries of origin. On the contrary, their children who have started their life in this country, experience a new dead end: at best, their life is going to be similar to their parents' life, which for this generation is a reason for rebelling. These young immigrants go to school and although, as previously written, they are not completely separated from the rest of the student population, they face racism and depreciation and know that they are the first for whom the social ladder is blocked. Apart from young Balkan immigrants participating in the wild school kids' protests in the various districts of Athens and Thessaloniki, groups-gangs of immigrant school kids also took part in the central demonstrations of December 8. Judging from their actions, they were not much willing to confront the cops. Their targets were mainly banks and public buildings, while some of them didn't miss the opportunity to loot stores.

The most recently arrived and impoverished immigrants also participated in the riots in Athens; those who live in the ghetto-districts of the city center, the redundant/excluded ones: Afghans, Pakistanis and Africans. From the very first moment these proletarians were involved in the conflicts which took place in the city centre, near their neighbourhoods, and looted a lot of stores during the first days of the December revolt. A lot of them took part in the attack against the police station at Omonia Sq. (which a lot of immigrant abuse incidents have been published about).

Of course, the coming together of various proletarian parts and their actions didn't always occur without conflicts. From the first day, a lot of immigrants were attacked when they attempted to loot. Furthermore, during the occupation of the National Technical University of Athens, which hosted many immigrants after the outbreak of the first days, there were intense conflicts between some anarchists and immigrants regarding looting. We cannot ignore the fact that in some cases conflicts about looting were being held during fights against police, since some looters did not support the fighting, which offered them the opportunity to appropriate commodities. Some rioters burnt commodities instead of taking them, underlining their usefulness appropriate for that moment. On the other hand, conflicts about lootings emerged in other cases too, even though there was no issue of supporting the barricade (as on Monday December 8). Those anarchists annoyed by the "thieves", instead of aiding re-appropriations of commodities carried out by people who did need them, they defended the "political correctness" of the events, that is they had already been thinking and acting in accordance to the opinion which would be formed about them after the end of the revolt.

State's response against immigrants participating in the revolt was well expected: repression, "clean sweep" operations, deportations and plans of building concentration camps. At the same time though, the wave of immigration is being magnified and Greek state faces large numbers of redundant proletarians who necessarily cross Greece due to its geographical position. This combination of the suffocating living condition for these "sans papiers" immigrants and their

experience of participating in the December events will play a major role in the forming of class struggle in Greece in the near future⁶.

‘General Assembly of Insurgent Workers’ (GSEE)

The occupation of GSEE⁷ building expressed in a contradictory way the power and the limit of the revolt. At first, base unionists (mainly the rank’n’file union of couriers) took up the initiative and, while the revolt was in progress, they grabbed the chance to strengthen their unions by a ‘spectacular’ action. Nevertheless, the occupation expressed the insurgent proletarians’ need to expand the revolt to the workplaces. The occupations of town halls and other state buildings in many neighbourhoods of Athens and other provinces had expressed the same need the previous days.

From the beginning of the occupation of the GSEE building, there was a radical tendency composed of precarious and ‘stable’ proletarians confronting unionists; they saw the occupation as the only chance to raise the matter of blocking the production sector, since after December 10 no other important strike had taken place. Of course, both tendencies attacked the main Greek bureaucratic trade-union (GSEE), but the concurrence of their views stopped there. Against the very content of the rebellion, the defenders of autonomous unionism defended *workers* identity and attempted, though unsuccessfully, to reduce the non-workers insurgents in the occupation. The opposing tendencies achieved their (contradictory) composition in the name of the occupation: *General Assembly of Insurgent Workers*.

The occupation of GSEE itself -just like the contradictions existing in the occupations in various neighbourhoods- brought *the impossibility of the expansion of the revolt* to the surface. A few thousand workers and unemployed went by the occupied building of GSEE, while more than five hundred people took part in the assemblies. However, in no case can one claim that even a small part of those proletarians supported the occupation suggesting specific actions in workplaces. Many of them came by out of curiosity and they didn’t take part in any procedure; in fact, they considered it to be a union procedure, that is, a discussion about possible working class demands and ways to promote them. Yet, just because the occupation didn’t have any demands (apart from the immediate release of the arrested insurgents), this contradiction many times led the discussions to chaos. Also, any interventions in workplaces organised (in call centers and a poll company) failed to achieve their aim: the blocking of production.

The occupation of the GSEE building lasted five days. Some base unionists, from the second day on, tried repeatedly to block its continuation against the need of most occupants to keep it going *without any demands*. It is remarkable, though, that in that conflict there were

⁶ The wild response of hundreds of immigrants in Athens in the demos of May 21 and 22, during which extended clashes with the police (“The first open conflict between the Greek Police and immigrants” was the title of a relative article in a daily newspaper) and riots (dozens of cars, banks and stores were smashed) took place, is not the result of another unimportant cop’s stupidity, when he decided to destroy a Muslim prayer book, nor of Muslim immigrants’ religious ideology (of course, existing), as the spectacle attempts to present it. It is suggestive that the Muslim Association of Greece condemned riots, claiming that they had been preplanned by radical elements and calling any Muslim willing to vandalise to leave Greece. The Greek state’s attempt to demonise “sans papiers” and turn the discontent of the most degraded parts of the Greek proletariat and petit-bourgeoisie against them, is more than obvious and rests of course in the material condition of immigrants’ lawbreaking actions, necessary for their survival.

⁷ The major union confederation in Greece.

comrades who are base union members *as well*, who defended the anti-union practice, that is, the continuation of an occupation without any demands, and remained in it. That is indicative of two things: firstly, at crucial historical moments, vertical delimitation of the tendencies of the movement based on political identities is abolished in practice; secondly, these tendencies, since base unionism is at its first steps, do not constitute concrete poles in the movement. Precisely because it's a very important conflict, which will be more intense in the future, what's important is its very existence and not how concrete the two sides were.

The last day of the occupation, the first event on solidarity with the arrested insurgents took place. This was the beginning of the post-rebellion developments in Athens. The "open assembly of solidarity to the arrested of the revolt" emerged from hundreds of participants. This assembly had been active for two and a half months before it degenerated. Another post-rebellion development in Athens, which derived after K. Kuneva's murder attempt, is also connected with the occupation of GSEE, since most participants had already met there. The conflicting co-existence of unionist and anti-union tendencies was made even clearer inside this development. The tendency that prevailed in the occupations of the Trade Union Centers, which took place later in Patras, Thessaloniki and other provincial cities and towns, was the unionist one, something that was inevitable after the end of the revolt.

'Violence against state violence' (old slogan)

In demonstrations during December, many more proletarians took part in the riots compared to past social movements. In the historical conditions of rebellion, people use improvised weapons made from materials that it's easy to find and transform their use. The pavement is made of stones and, indeed, it is the pavement that writes history. From the first day of the uprising, many people attacked the police throwing water, flower pots and pieces of wood from their balconies; the various objects that hit cops' heads manifested the increased level of socialisation of proletarian violence. The clashes with the police during the uprising expressed hate and anger against the most apparent expression of the reality as a whole and not only against "potential children murderers". The form of the modern state that corresponds to the contemporary reality of the class relation is the form of repression: police. This is because it has historically become particularly difficult for the state to fulfill the role of the agent of social reproduction in a way different from repression. The modern security state is destined to perform a specific function of social reproduction: that of discipline, of raw and violent imposition of the generalisation of a condition more painful than that of the "stable" wage labour. It is about the imposition and management of the condition of being a "redundant proletarian", an individual constantly being on the limit between social life inside work and the chaos outside it. Labour power is not automatically positioned where the expanded reproduction of capital demands; it must be disciplined.

Social violence, its level and content, has always been the expression of the already existing level of class struggle. A strike that blocks production or a demo that blocks the circulation of commodities or an occupation of a university building by students are no "peaceful protests"; this definition, that is made up by the state, simply expresses the balance of power in an existing war that we experience everyday: class war. When the state says "peaceful actions", it means "tolerable". The degree of repressive violence against every social movement is the unit of measurement of state's tolerance. Tolerance to certain proletarian practices is the flipside of fear of other proletarian practices that further destabilise capital domination. Thus, in the present

historical period, when the cities are on fire, a demo without riots is called “peaceful”. When a generalised social explosion seems dangerously probable, a single sectional strike appears, on the part of capital, as paradise. This situation, however, depends upon several aspects of class struggle. In the past, police have attacked protesters without using violence as an excuse. We have witnessed cops attacking teachers being completely unarmed, without even “street weapons” in their hands, beating pensioners who were just eating bread rolls or even passers-by who, only by their presence, *strengthen social street practices* that the state has to keep marginalised.

On the other hand, it is evident that a demo that denounces social violence and tries to protect itself from it (like those of the Communist Party of Greece), denounces the historical possibility of violence to upgrade itself as an expression of conflict and, in this way, *it already collaborates with the police*. And if, in the practice of the Communist Party, the collaboration with the police is *sufficient but indirect*, the practice of sit-ins in front of the Parliament with school kids handing out flowers to the police (taking care of blocking completely nothing) was an *insufficient but direct collaboration with the police*.

In the antiauthoritarian/anarchist milieu, because of its historical familiarisation with riots and violent clashes with cops, the view that the matter is to “implant” street violence in social movements through exemplary action is quite widespread. Yet, in the specific case of the December revolt, violence was used with unprecedented ease. The question of the violent vanguard was not practically posed when “novices” and “the vanguard” met each other at streets; it was posed only in the heads of the vanguards, in a sense that “we have been overcome by the rebellion”. As a comrade said in a popular assembly: “*Everybody knew that tear gases were on the agenda*”. There was no need to promote violence; it was already a part of social dynamics. Of course, there have always been radical proletarian minorities inside social struggles. Historically, however, every single action of such a minority becomes a practice of the majority when it derives from the needs of the struggle. If it is not generalised, it’s marginalised and tends to become a fetish, something estranged from the struggle and its level. When the rebellion recedes, there necessarily appears a distance between violent political practices by groups or cliques of radicals and the return of the social movement to normality. For some tendencies, the more their means become separated from the needs of the social movement, the more these means are imposed as an end in themselves. The “insurrection always and everywhere” viewpoint is unhistorical, as every vanguard’s approach that disdains the fact that history is written by the proletariat and not by vanguards. After the December revolt, such vanguard actions became more frequent (and audacious against the state) and tend to become a mode of existence of normality. Moreover, the generalisation of repressive management means that capital takes a more conflictive form. This is why the spatial confinement of the riots in the limits of the Exarchia ghetto favours the state; in this way, it is able to define the spatial field, the agents and the content of the conflict. Of course, the limits between the social dimension and the political one of the antiauthoritarian/anarchist milieu are inevitably not easily discernible. Fights between teenagers and police patrols in Exarchia or throwing molotov cocktails against police special forces are part of a low intensity war between the state and sections of the youth. However, these actions are interwoven with the “insurrectionary prospect” and tend to entrench themselves in a “marginal” vendetta between anarchists/antiauthoritarians and the police. Those who resort to violence having mainly the aim to propagandise violent action itself, the experts of violence, never escape Leninism, since they substitute their own action for the violent action of the proletariat (which they themselves belong to); it is of no importance if they are organised in an horizontal or vertical way. Finally, (for the more or less official) groups of radicals, the question of the content of

violence is necessarily posed: if the aim is to hurt the prestige of the police, then it suffices that the vanguards of social violence arm themselves and confront the police; if, however, revolution means creating new relations through destroying the old ones, then only the continuation of social struggle, insomuch as it is historically feasible, can create the conditions of overcoming capital. Violent clashes with the police are not revolutionary *by themselves*, just as any other single activity. If the community of the barricade remains behind it and does not diffuse itself in space and time, if an occupation confines itself in a building, then it cannot be revolutionary, no matter how militant and radical it is. Revolution is *the class that in the conflict with capital abolishes itself as a class*.

Exactly the opposite (that is, confinement of the action within certain limits) is the result of the so-called exemplary actions like those of Revolutionary Struggle and the rest of the groups that are ambitious to become the armed vanguard of the movement. After the attack by Revolutionary Struggle on December 23, which was performed from the roof of an antiauthoritarian student squat, but mostly after the attack on January 5 in Exarchia, violent practices acquired a dimension estranged from what insurgents had been living for over a month. Military action (which in no case overcame the practices of the diffused proletarian guerilla, but objectively stood at the opposite side), an action estranged from social relations, although it may be militarily effective, it is socially useless; to the extent that it represents nobody but its actors, it only creates *spectators*. Estranged not only from the form but also from the content of insurgents' diffused guerilla, the so-called armed vanguard is of no help for the movement; when they are right about the level of violence to be used, everybody will know that! Just as some other fractions of the non-parliamentary left that came out of their holes and opportunistically tried to extract the political surplus value out of the December revolt, Revolutionary Struggle attempted to *politically* utilise the retreat of the rebellion. Revolutionary Struggle, having a political programme, used the weapons of politics to propagandise its politics (supposedly of weapons). Only the continuity and the generalisation of the proletarian struggle up to the point that the proletarians will have to arm themselves in order to defend the struggle, and their own lives, constitutes the condition that will necessarily make the proletariat arm itself and not the exhortation of an armed leadership.

'Neither fascism *nor* democracy (?), down with statism, long live anarchy' or the contradictory role of the antiauthoritarian/anarchist milieu during the rebellion

The "antiauthoritarian/anarchist milieu" was presented to a great extent outside Greece, (mainly) by alternative media, as the vanguard of the December revolt. It is true that the contribution of several components of the "milieu" (more or less organised) was very important at the beginning of the uprising, as their sharp reflexes against state repression and their familiarisation with violent practices helped them react immediately after the murder, which, moreover, took place in Exarchia, the "anarchist district" in Athens. Nevertheless, in no case can we say that "the rebellion was carried out by anarchists", nor they were proportionally the most important part during the riots from December 7 to December 10. That's why the assessment that "all vanguards were overcome" was dominant and expressed as such in all the assemblies that followed, during the next days. This assessment, however, was already buried in the mid-January, when every kind of "vanguard" sought to overemphasise, and sometimes fabricate, their contribution to the December events.

An important contribution by antiauthoritarians/anarchists was also the occupation of university buildings at the centres of Athens and Thessaloniki. In Athens, initiatives for blocking metro stations and violent actions against the police were organized by university occupations in the city centre. Occupying central university buildings has been a traditional practice of antiauthoritarians/anarchists; it was also implemented during the riots that followed Michalis Kaltezas' murder in 1985. Yet, during the December revolt, this practice was diffused to other Greek cities, as well, although in a sporadic and less dynamic way. An important new aspect was the occupations of town-halls and other public buildings, mainly in areas where antiauthoritarian squats/haunts are. The main aims of these occupations were the "continuation and the extension of the revolt", the need for "counter-information" and "expressing solidarity" with those arrested.

Solidarity activities and local demos (some of them violent) were organized by public buildings occupations in various districts and suburbs. The ideology of direct democracy, however, dominant among certain parts of the "milieu" that were very active during the December events resulted in overemphasising "popular assemblies" *as part of a political programme of "direct democracy"*. The assemblies are presented as the absolute form of self-organisation, namely of the action that lies outside the mediations of any kind of institutions, even of political groups that may participate in the assembly. They are presented as the triumph of general will, fermentation, fertile debate, as the natural and par excellence place where the movement normally *takes decisions concerning actions*. Yet, in fact, there are activities with a certain content, violent actions without demands such as blocking the production, attacking the means of production, sabotaging distribution networks, destroying infrastructure, that have not really been decided during an assembly in terms of direct democracy, even if the realisation of such activities may be presented as the decision of the assembly. If, during an assembly, a rebellious activity is decided, it's because the participants have already decided or/and fermented it in the numerous discussions prior to the assembly. When the movement has no demands to rise, what can take place during an assembly is to confirm a decision that has already been taken or block a proposed activity⁸. The self-organised activity of the assemblies is interwoven with the existence of demands. Self-organisation -or direct workers democracy- constitutes the means that is able to strengthen proletariat's position in the capital relation and for this purpose exceeds any other means; this is obvious in self-organised movements of today concerning local issues and/or rank'n'file unions.

In the rebellion, as we have already stressed, only a small minority of the proletariat participated. However, the advancement of history, which is nothing other than class struggle, has never been the result of majority rule. On Saturday night, December 6, in both Athens and Thessaloniki, big assemblies were held in which a socially wide part of the antiauthoritarian/anarchist milieu participated; in no case did an assembly decide to make a rebellion. School kids attacked police departments realising a decision already made; no democratic discussions took place. On Monday December 8, no assembly or any other procedure decided that stores and buildings must be smashed and, of course, proletarians did not vote for or

⁸ The authority of the assembly over action appeared mainly in the neighbourhood occupations and the GSEE occupation. There are many examples where action was blocked in the name of the assembly and its authority. A characteristic example is the popular assembly of Ano Poli in Thessaloniki, which postponed the occupation of the municipal library for several days, because of the paralysis caused by the lack of unanimity during the assembly. This situation was not *so* intense in the ASOEE and the National Technical University occupations. These assemblies played the role of proletarian meeting places rather than decision-making procedures.

against looting: they acted in concert with each other. The case of GSEE is even more interesting: the number of those who decided to occupy the building was so small that they clearly had no democratic legitimisation. In addition, the assembly that “decided” the occupation did not really discuss whether the occupation was to take place or not. That decision had already been made in advance, it had resulted as a common need of the proletarians that had been fighting side by side during the uprising and, at the same time, manifested the relations that had been created beforehand (with all their contradictions).

It is quite revealing that, whenever a tendency of the movement withdrew, the excuse it used was the assembly: in the case of a local demo in Aghios Dimitrios district on December 12, a part of the protesters, who weren't willing to attack the police station together with the school kids, the excuse was that no assembly decision for this had occurred. At the GSEE occupation, when the unionist tendency disagreed with an action or a proposal, the excuse was the preparatory assembly which “had decided” the occupation but not such a thing. Therefore, the assembly appears to be the cause of a proletarian action or the cause of its continuation precisely because it can put an end to this action or restrain it. It is falsely perceived as its detonator, while it is merely a way for a different content to be given.

Popular assemblies as spaces of immediate gatherings of people constituted, on the one hand, the overcoming of past ways of communication; on the other hand, however, they were nothing but *democratic procedures*. While the rebellion was a fact and the occupations were the antidemocratic practice that reached the neighbourhoods, the assembly mediation presented itself *as necessary* in order for the street practices to be diffused in these same neighbourhoods. The fact that occupations focused on public administration buildings and not on other workplaces, *already* indicated that democracy would return as the limit of the rebellion. People that had not taken part in riots during the previous days joined the assemblies. It was a part of the working class that did not rebel, felt though the need to communicate with the insurgents, and in some cases another social part that was against the rebellion: mainly, petit-bourgeois elements of each neighbourhood that were afraid of the possibility of a *real* extension of the revolt in the neighbourhoods and correctly realised that there is enough room within a democratic procedure for their views. On the one hand, participation in procedures became more massive (at least in the beginning); on the other hand, it is exactly this wide composition that could smoothen and decelerate the action. In fact, several discussions and conflicts took place and, in the end, as the rebellion faded, the assemblies were turned into instruments of struggle on “local issues”. In popular assemblies, a democratic critique of democracy was expressed: the existing democracy is not enough, more of it is required! The rebellion bore its own limits, as every other proletarian movement has done until today: on the one hand, democracy and, on the other, unionism, which comes today to reap the fruits of the rebellion and devour its energy.

‘Bastards, time is running short for your society; we’ve balanced its joys and its rights and found them scanty...’ (from a leaflet)

By the end of 2008, Greek economy had already been decelerating and at the beginning of 2009 it went into recession. However, what this overall picture conceals is that the sectors which the reproduction of Greek capital is mainly based on, had already gone into recession during 2008: the construction sector had already shrunk by 9.4% in 2008, while the manufacturing sector, which had already been in recession since 2005, shrunk another 4% in 2007-08. Among the sectors that display a high concentration of (already precarious) work force, tourism was the only

one that decelerated by as late as the 4th trimester of 2008, albeit for obvious reasons the international crisis had already exerted heavy pressure on the workers of this sector. The course of the above three sectors, which concentrate 27% of the total work force, cannot be balanced by the course of the financial sector, which amounts to a 2.6% of the total work force. Moreover, the recent laws concerning work relations and the three pension reforms, which have been voted for by the Greek state during the last fifteen years, have attacked the work force occupied in social administration as well as in education, which amounts to a 15% of the total work force. The fact that personal consumption has been dramatically decreased during 2008, in comparison to 2007, indicates that the Greek proletariat and mostly its precarious parts, had already faced the effects of the reproduction crisis since 2008 and knew all too well what to expect in the future.

The restructuring which capital initiated throughout the western world from the mid-70s and in Greece in the mid-80s, has led to the fragmentation of the working class, thus rendering class struggle itself fragmented. The weapons of the restructuring turn now against capital itself. The defeats of revindicative working class struggles in Greece over the last fifteen years and the subsequent degradation of the living conditions of a large part of the proletariat *bore within themselves* the December revolt. The bullet that left the cop's gun on December 6 delegitimised everything: the repression used as an (unsuccessful) means of coping with young proletarians, the precarisation of life itself, the massive admission of immigrants and their being used as a battering ram in order to degrade and render even more flexible all kinds of work relations.

The limit of the rebellion is to be found in the fact that it did not expand to the workplaces. If the production process had been blocked (which would have evoked the subsequent state's violent reaction), the need to deepen the struggle would have been immediately posed. But it didn't, and this is directly connected to the composition of the participants. Tactical mistakes cannot account for the end of a rebellion; they can only affect the details and velocity of the retreat. Apart from molecular minorities, "stable" workers did not participate in the rebellion. How could have the production process been disturbed, when most of the participants find themselves on the border zone between employment and unemployment or are not yet involved in the production process? The fact that the general strike on December 10 failed to link these two worlds proved first of all, that the revolt (mostly of the precarious workers) cannot be generalised *today*, in the same way that struggle of the "stable" part of the working class against the restructuring of the pension system that took place last year proved that a revolt cannot easily emerge from a general strike (which mobilizes mainly "stable" workers); a strike which expresses the interests of a part of the class that still identifies itself as "workers" and finds itself in the defense, for it still feels that it *does* have things to lose.

The developments in Greece after December unravel more clearly the causes of the impossibility of a generalisation of the revolt at this specific historical period of class struggle. In all sectors of production where most of the older workers are primarily "stable workers", while newcomers enter production under the "new work relations", conflicts between them emerge, which in some cases are violent (for example, in OTE -the ex-public telecommunications organisation-, public hospitals and schools). In a period during which the capitalist crisis is sharpened, the room available inside the "brave world" of capital is reduced and proletarians *are forced to* compete with each other for it. As we've mentioned above, base unionism manifested itself as a new current in Greece in the GSEE and Trade Union Centers occupations, in a similar way it occurs in France, Belgium and Britain. What is important, though, is that capitalists make use of the crisis itself in order to make work relations even more flexible and attack proletarian reproduction. That is why it seems impossible for these union attempts, which lie on the border

between legality and illegality, to be successful for *everyone* involved. Until now, empirical evidence manifests (and we are in the beginning of these developments) that the result of such union struggles will be the deepening of the divisions among precarious workers *themselves*, something that goes beyond the present division between precarious and stable workers⁹. Of course, there is always the possibility for the mobilisation of precarious workers to create ruptures inside the trade-unions of stable workers and give the opportunity to radical minorities of stable workers to liberate themselves -at last- from the practices necessarily reproduced in the unions which they belong to, not without controversies. The question then becomes: could revindicative struggles be successful even in this case? It is highly doubtful since capital's unwillingness to return to the social-democratic strategy is not a matter of a coincidental balance of forces, but a historical one, that is the result of the accumulation of class struggles of the past *and* of capital's restructuring/counter-revolution, which followed the period of the great class struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. Nor is the form of organisation of revindicative struggles that crucial factor that will decide their success or failure. Indeed, self-organisation of revindicative struggles prevails in the most violent and aggressive ones during the 1960s and 1970s. Class struggles (in the western world) from the restructuring onward take up essentially two forms: on the one hand, there are struggles (which constitute the majority) of those parts of the working class who suffer the attempted by capital transformation of class composition and defend themselves; on the other hand, there are struggles of those parts that already live under the conditions of new work relations or enter labour market facing those relations, struggles that put forward demands which are really difficult to be met, because they aren't merely defensive but ask for a return to the past, or put forward no demands at all. It is obvious that we live in a crucial historical period, in which the perspective of abolishing capital (but also the strengthening of its dominance) is before us.

In December, it was also made obvious that the general historical development of the precarisation of workers' life is not merely a weapon of capital, since it turned against it. In the future, this tendency, as a capitalist strategy, will keep developing. The most probable result will be that trade-union struggles will continue, be intensified and take up even more violent forms, because this is the only way proletarians can attempt to maintain their lives as proletarians, a life that is all the more endangered. A recent example is "boss kidnappings" in France, in cases of factories being shut down and workers demanding higher compensations. The forms of organisation of union struggles *are going to be judged by their results*, as in the past. It is thus possible even in a short while to see the emerging base unions in crisis. But, unionism is also the content and not merely a form. Struggles that may emerge in the future *without the mediation* of any kind of base union will continue to put forward demands for a better location of the proletarians inside the capital relation, as long as they are union struggles.

Union struggles will eventually fail in the sense that it is impossible for them to achieve a regulation of the class relation alternative to the dominant tendency of the international capitalist accumulation. This estimation does not mean that we reduce any proletarian struggle. If the critique of capital is historical and aims at its abolition, then we cannot theorise the revolution today as the constant reinforcement of struggles over immediate demands and their all the more

⁹ An illustrative example is the evolvement of the struggle of the cleaners employed by OIKOMET. Since the demand of the trade-union PEKOP to achieve permanent contracts at HSAP necessarily took the form of permanent labour contract through ASEP, the division between "European" and "non-European" workers was inescapable. In spite of this, the trade-union insists in its statements to demand the stable employment of cleaning-ladies in all state-controlled enterprises!

autonomous expression. The reasons for which capital is unable to satisfy union demands are historical and connected to the dialectical relation between the content of past proletarian struggles and capital's counter-revolutions/restructurings. History is not a temporal pendulum. History is class struggle, that is, the conflict between classes *and* leads to the creation of *new* forms of social relations. The new form is the result of this conflict and *the rupture with the content* of this conflict. There are of course divergences regarding capital's development in various areas of the world, but a tendency of convergence has been historically accelerated. Today, due to capitalist crisis, it is all the more accelerated. Different types of proletarian reaction in various places of the world compose the as yet contradictory picture of class struggle, but the revolution will either be worldwide or won't take place.

All the same, we don't intend to propel anyone to a passive stance of waiting (as a matter of fact we ourselves participate straightforwardly in the everyday struggles which immediately concern us). Moreover, the above don't mean that the proletariat will necessarily be driven to the revolution because everything else will have failed. Struggles over immediate demands through their combating character and mostly through their failure will lead to the crisis of unionism and *the historical possibility of marking a rupture with it, the possibility for its historical overcoming*. These struggles, due to their contradictions, will pose the issue of a qualitative transition from demanding a better place inside capital to the abolition of capital, namely *the claim of reproduction to be identified with the overcoming of capitalism*. By studying class struggles of today we can observe two things: on the one hand, struggles over immediate demands become even "wilder" and more "desperate" and, on the other hand, struggles without demands are multiplied. There are cases of fired workers destroying the factories they had been working in, we can see strikes evolving independently from the perspective of the satisfaction of their demands and above all we can see the movement of 2005-06 in France and December 2008 in Greece.

It may be the case that in the future the rupture provoked by struggles without demands will be reinforced. The dynamics of class struggle and the dialectics between demanding and destroying may lead the struggles of different parts of workers and unemployed, whose reproduction becomes even more precarious, to take up the form of a struggle against capital relation itself, as it has already been expressed in December 2008 in Greece - although it was a struggle of a minority, the latter acted in a diffused way all over the country. It may be the case that the "dangerous class" will appear aggressively in the foreground and the proletariat will start gradually attacking workplaces, apart from state buildings which, no matter how many cops are hired to guard them, remain in an uneasy condition. The insurrection will rise before us.

Woland for Blaumachen