An interview

Nikos Romanos

2015

Nikos Romanos was a model teenager, a good student from the bourgeoisie, son of a well-known novelist, until on December 6, 2008 he was involved in a traumatic event. His best friend, the young anarchist Alexandros Grigoropoulos (15 years) falls under the bullets of the police in the streets of Athens. Shot in the heart, he dies in his arms. This event leads to some of the most intense urban riots of the early 21st century in the West, and Nikos is already there on the front line that same evening, enraged, dignified in the face of the media (total rejection), and respected by comrades despite his young age.

To the rhythm of the backlash from the Greek anarchist movement, Nikos is forever changed by this experience, immediately throwing himself headlong into the anarchist struggle, until his arrest five years later after a double armed robbery in the Kozani region. He is tortured and accused of belonging to the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (armed anarchist-nihilist organization), which he denies, whereas he takes responsibility for the robberies (and their need in order to spread anarchy). He and his five co-accused Giannis Michailidis, Dimitris Politis, Andreas-Dimitris Bourzoukos, Argyris Dalios et Fivos Charisis, maintain a confrontational attitude towards justice throughout, but Argyris Dalios and Fivos Charisis categorically deny ALL charges in relation to the Velventos case. However, on October 1st 2014, they are all declared guilty of the robberies and each is sentenced to fifteen years' prison. All six of them were acquitted of alleged involvement in the CCF.

Nikos Romanos has also claimed responsibility for four incendiary actions.

Tell us a little bit about what has happened concerning the academic leave of absence you have demanded within the new judicial framework after your hunger strike in NovemberDecember 2014.

It goes like this: I completed 1/3 of the course as required by the new regulation and I made the request for educational leave. From that point on began the theater of the absurd. The prison board decided that the new regulation cannot be put into effect, it requires a joint ministerial decision and so it sent the request to the special appellate magistrate E. Nikopoulos, in line with the previous law. Nikopoulos issued a negative response because there is no ministerial decision and one cannot get into the merits of the application as the new judicial framework annuls and takes the place of the prior one. Based on the negative opinion of Nikopoulos, the Board rejected the leave request in its turn as the decision of the trial judge is binding.

In light of this *fait accompli*, SYRIZA — which during the hunger strike concentrated on electioneering and brutal political exploitation on the backs of the people who made up the polymorphic solidarity movement — plays the role of Pontius Pilate, just like its predecessors. But of course this should come as no surprise since we are talking about politicians- that is to say, total bastards, political swindlers, opportunists, hypocrites and professional chameleons, who for a small time wore the costume of the humanist to serve certain political purposes. Of course there are more important reasons for that development, but I'll keep this explanation for a later question. Concerning the progress of my case, theoretically speaking, there should be a ministerial decree to implement the new regulation, but I don't think there is much possibility for that to happen.

Do you think that behind the "delays" on the electronic monitoring wristband, there are political considerations or vindictive behavior directed against you?

I believe that in this instance there is not even a really existing electronic monitoring wristband, because regardless of the claims of the Department of Justice, we who are in prison know that there is not a single prisoner in any prison in Greece who has been released in this way. Every day many prisoners come and ask me about this issue and they all wonder why there is no one who has received an answer from the judicial councils to which they have made their applications. Because the inmates communicate with each other in prisons and keep updated on issues that concern them, I can say with confidence that there is no prisoner who has set foot outside of any prison in this way. Because this type of news would certainly create a scandal in such a well-known case, the seemingly faceless monster bureaucracy provides a solution to this problem.

Bureaucracy, however, is not something impersonal, rather this is the alibi of persons in positions of authority to pass off their responsibilities to something that supposedly surpasses them- to an invisible ally hidden behind legislative committees, technical consultants, stacks of papers, complex interpretations and false hopes. What I am saying, *namely that there is no electronic monitoring bracelet currently available,* and the Ministry of Justice is mocking prisoners to avoid a scandal is simply a fact that leaves no room for doubt and cannot be contradicted by anyone or any fact, since there is no prisoner who has been released or taken sabbatical leave in this way. Although unnecessary, I will bring up an example from Korydallos prison, of which I have had a personal view. There were some prisoners who are studying in various technical universities and, given the new judicial framework, wanted to ask for educational leave as now is the time for exams. Those who passed by the judicial council (and in order to avoid responsibility everyone on the council can hide behind a magistrate) were told really ridiculous lies- that the council could not get in touch with the secretariats of their schools and so asked them to come back in September. This fact means that the Prison Board has taken specific instructions from the Ministry of Justice in order to conceal the matter and to not allow to the surface the real causes of all of these maneuvers.

How do you judge the attitude of the new SYRIZA government?

To take things from the beginning, Syriza was a hostile arrangement long before it became government. Their role was to absorb social tensions, to gain political capital from participation in intermediate social struggles by presenting themselves as their institutional hand, to operate anti-insurrectionally in transferring the field of confrontation from the streets to bourgeois democratic politics. In a few words, they embodied in the best possible way the important political role of reformism. Moreover Tsipras himself before becoming prime minister had declared

that without Syriza there would have been much more unrest and riots in Greece during the years of anti-government demonstrations. This shows that the implementation of a leftist political agenda in the opposition was, among other things, a political strategy selected to ensure social peace and to rebuild the damaged social contract upon new bases.

Democracy hides many aces up its sleeve to maintain social cohesion, and one of the weapons in its arsenal is the rapid alternation of roles on the political stage, reshuffling the deck, and also the assimilation of radical propositions that can turn against it. Turning to today, after the rise of Syriza to power, there are structural changes in rhetoric and huge internal contradictions. Of course, despite all of its contradictions, the reality that it imposes is one that still keeps in force the C-type prisons which continue to exist, since outside Domokos remain special police vehicles and isolation wards are still holding comrades, and since migrants continue to be marked with numbers before being sent to concentration camps. Furthermore, the invasion of occupied spaces, torturing hunger striking comrades, being responsible for vindictively keeping hostage relatives and partners of the CCF- like in Salamina where it launches the first place of exile in era of democracy- in signing trade partnerships with the murderers of the Palestinians, and which shortly will implement all the neoliberal policies that they were opposed to as the opposition; in short, Syriza fully retains all those geopolitical, economic and military commitments of a state that belongs to the capitalist periphery, while at the same time to throw dust in the eyes of leftist voters it actively supports some moth-eaten bureaucratic officials who maintain a leftist rhetoric, and yet when the hour comes for the political mutation of Syriza, they will be thrown out.

Seeing things from our point of view, the fact that we are anarchists means that *even if* Syriza was really a leftist government with radical politics it would still find us opposing it without any intention to sign a truce with these well-schooled magicians of illusion and organized oppression, and in opposition to the neo-communist gangrene that infects some anarchist circles, we long ago cut the umbilical cord of anarchy with the left. But it is important to be precise in our characterizations in order to analyze the reality that we have facing us.

Therefore, Syriza is a social democratic government, with pseudoradical rhetoric that exploits a left political profile to gain control and influence over movements and subversive projects which potentially could turn against them. And let's not forget that historically the political representation of capitalism with socialist forms has implemented the harshest economic and repressive policies in taking advantage of the endless and culpable sleep of the social majority. The most infuriating to our own circles is that there are several clowns who play at being anarchists, and who have the audacity to invite members of Syriza into "social centers" [*untranslatable pun here: could also read 'centers for the society of syriza'*] and discuss with them profoundly ideological issues promoting a perception that whitewashes Syriza- which as we speak is the administrator of the state. A sad and similar thought-process as those who want to educate the fascists of Golden Dawn- as if the issue with the fascists or the managers of the state machine is to discuss our disagreements and not to fight them wherever we find them. All this would be a nice literary conversation for those who believe in democracy and its ideals, sleeping on pink clouds and dreaming of post-capitalist societies- except for the fact that anarchists have war with democracy and its exponents. In consequence of where we find ourselves, all who operate in whitewashing Syriza have no excuse. Moreover, it has been only a short while since Stavros Theodorakis gave a tribute to some "protagonists" for the legality certificates which they have given to the state. For this threadbare opposition government and the crypto-Syriza, pseudo-ideological anarchists, as well as other hangers-on, the solution is simple: a stout tree and a strong rope. We stand by

all those who remain friends of anarchist revolt and still insist on throwing Molotov cocktails at cops in Exarchia, who go on demonstrations to vandalize representations of sovereignty, who arm their minds with subversive plans and their hands with fire to burn the structures of the new order. To all who organize their deeds through informal anarchist direct action networks, where destructive intentions are joined horizontally and informally in a chaotic front that goes on the offensive by targeting persons and infrastructure that administer and defend this sick world that surrounds us.

What in your opinion is the place of violence in the anarchist movement?

Once again in recent times we have reached a turning point of the modern historical process. A bankrupt Greek capitalism has to cater, even if inconsistently, to the European Union and the global economy. And the reality is that it will continue to do so regardless of its political managers. The borders of Greece and Italy as the first host countries of migration from war zones are drenched in blood from the bodies of migrants. Transnational rivalries of powerful states increase and conflicts of geopolitical interests trigger outbreaks of unrest in many parts of the world. For anarchists, instability and worsening systemic violence across the diffuse spectrum of exploitative social relations is a challenge to organize effectively to become a powerful destabilizing factor of normality. An anarchist counter attack against the world of authority, of economists, of politicians, of cops, fascists, journalists, scientists, officers, managers and executives of multinationals, judicial officials, directors of prisons, bankers and their associates, the vigilantes and their willing servants of power. Faced with all these bastards who are the heart of the capitalist machine that beats to the rhythm of the social majority (who either out of indifference, fear, or complicity, contribute to protecting the heart of the beast), anarchy responds with the language of absolute violence, fire, explosions, armed rebellion, in this key assumption we begin formulating our strategies, deciding to rebel and join in the battle for total liberation. A revolt in the present time will be all-in, it will release within the revolutionary community real human relationships and will know to organize its attacks. This will be the vehicle to travel uncharted paths of freedom, enabling us to exist and live without receiving and giving instructions, without obeying, without crawling, but in a genuine way creating a new reality in the capitalist metropolises- the season of fear for the rulers and their minions, the dawn of our era, now and forever, until the end. Thus the position of organized revolutionary violence within the anarchist movement is the Alpha and Omega, it is the driving force for the qualitative evolution of an internal enemy that will cause nightmares for authority and bosses.

Do you consider that prison is a field of struggle for a political prisoner?

First we have to knock down the myths that hover over such places, such as the collective fantasy that wants the social identity of the prisoner to be a potentially revolutionary subject. Social identities — migrants, prisoners, workers, students- are societal subgroups that are dependent and feed in their own way the functioning of the capitalist world. In my view, free humanity appears where societal identities and their properties collapse, at the point where the individual decision for freedom creates a new unique and separate identity: the insurrectionary and iconoclast who attacks by any means necessary the enemies of freedom. For an anarchist who has decided to actively participate in the adventure of anarchist revolt, prison or even death are possible consequences of the choices made in the real world and not in a virtual reality where verbosity and fantasy are common. The prison is a temporary way-station for those hit by repression. It's where our internal metal is tested in practice, the final point of major decisions and major internal changes. It's a rotten social structure within which reigns brutality and subjugation, it's the

dark realm of power, the place of betrayal, the place where freedom is not only captured but for many humiliated and dragged bleeding between drugs, discipline and dirty corridors, where people learn to hate themselves. Thousands of analyses exist concerning prison and its inhabitants, so I'll just repeat what Jean Marc Rouillan, an urban guerrilla of Action Direct, has said: the most appropriate people to talk about prison are those who spend a small portion of their life inside.

For the truth is that the more you spend your life in here, the more difficult it becomes to describe the function and structure of this really miserable community. In summary therefore, prison means slow death, social cannibalism, resignation to weakness, psychosomatic destruction, hard drugs, psychiatric pills, human waste piled in state landfills, discipline, hierarchy, religious fanaticism, tribal groupings and pervasive racism, nationalistic notions of every shade, confined waiting, self-destruction, deadlocks, murderous feelings, covert coercion, general immobility, and fixation. It is no exaggeration to say that the society of prisoners is the bastard child of capitalist society, a well-oiled killing machine made of ice wherein lies the entire surplus ugliness of the modern world. This does not mean that within the prison there are not minorities of people who have oriented their lives towards dignity, and with whom we can develop friendly relations or even comradeship. Returning to the original part of the question, I think that in this test there should never be forgotten responsibility towards the final goal and dedication to the common cause. Never regretting, never with bowed head, forever dangerous to this civilization of voluntary slavery and submission. For this reason anarchist struggles in prison can surely find a way to create chances to become a danger for the enemy.

With texts and analyses, with small and large refusals, with hunger strikes, the thread of anarchic revolt continues to be woven so long as the flame of destruction burns in our hearts. With this understanding prison becomes a field of struggle for the promotion of subversive struggle and anarchy.

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