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PART I An updated short presentation of the recent riots in Athens and Thessaloniki through the eyes of some proletarian participants

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PART I : Summary of the events in Athens

Shooting by police on Saturday 6th of December has triggered off in cities all over Greece the fiercest riots in decades. What follows is a first –and incomplete– presentation of the recent riots in Athens based on our own experiences and on what we have heard of. On the one hand, the fierceness of the riots and the determination of the rioters and looters and on the other hand, the unfolding strategy of the state certainly need more time and closer attention to be adequately estimated, something that we are honestly not in the position to do at the moment, because we still participate in several local activities, demos and assemblies.

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Saturday, 6th of December

At about 9.10pm, a police special guard shot dead a 15-year-old boy, Alexis-Andreas Grig-oropoulos, in cold blood, in a quite usual bickering near Exarhia Square. Immediately after that, lots of people –mainly anti-authoritarians– gathered in the area to find out what's going on and to express their rage against police brutality. Hundreds of policemen attempted to seal the area in order to suppress any reactions, but with no result. Spontaneously, people started to attack the police in the streets around the square with every means possible. In less than two hours, more than 10,000 people had taken to the nearby streets to communicate the event and clash with the police. Some anarchist groups occupied the historical building of the Na-tional Technical University, which lies a few blocks away, and the Faculty of Economics, which is situated 1km away to use them as centres of struggle. The same was done by leftists at the Faculty of Law, less than 1km from the point where the murder took place. At this dis-trict, clashes with the police and attacks against banks and stores lasted until 4am, as far as we have witnessed.

The news concerning the murder spread rapidly to many people through mobile phones and the internet. As a result, about 150 people, who already were at Monastiraki Square, spon-taneously attacked and looted almost all the stores at Ermou Street, the world's 11th most posh street. There, lots of passers by joined in from nearby pubs and clubs. In the centre of Athens that night, some people attacked the police station near Acropolis causing severe damage.

It has to be noted that the news concerning the murder of the young boy immediately spread to several cities (Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Irakleio, Volos) where attacks against banks, police stations and stores also took place.

Sunday, 7th of December

The Faculty of Law squat called for a demonstration at 2pm outside the Archaeological Mu-seum which is right next to the also squatted historical building of the National Technical University in Patission Avenue. Many people gathered and at about 3.30pm the demo to-wards the Athens Police Headquarters begins. We already knew that the police would never let us approach their Headquarters, but we were determined to arrive as close as we could. Bank-smashing and stone-throwing against the cops started immediately after we had left the square. As we turned right to Alexandras Avenue standing at the end of the demo, we real-ized that the participants amounted to

approximately 4.000 people, of all ages. There were attacks against every store in sight, mainly luxury car shows and banks. At the beginning, police stood at a safe distance from the rioters and didn't let themselves become a target. Then, as they came closer, the rioters attacked them mainly with stones. The police made a first attempt to break the demo with teargas near Argentina Square, but with no result. After ten minutes, at the corner with Ippokratous street, they made a second fiercer attempt with lots of teargas which finally proved successful : the demo broke into several parts and its main parts headed to the right towards Neapoli. Attacks against stores and banks kept going on, also accompanied by car-smashing. Lots of people chose to keep on marching towards Police Headquarters by a parallel street, but after some time it became clear that there was no way through : a small street perpendicular to Alexandras Avenue is the spot that the already famous photo with the gun-holding riot policeman was taken. Tension was high. We decided to move back and return to Exarhia Square to see what was to be done next. At the way back, clashes with the police were still taking place but to a lesser extent. Some people attacked the 5th police station which is located nearby and the police responded with plastic bullets.

Later in the evening, there began clashes with the police again –and to a lesser extent attacks against stores– around the National Technical University and the Faculty of Economics, which would last until late at night.

Monday, 8th of December

In the morning, youths from several high schools gathered spontaneously in front of the Police Headquarters to protest. Many youths from the northern, east and western suburbs moved to the city centre making a spontaneous demo. Youths from the schools of Pireaus (a port at the south-west part of the city) attacked the central police station overturning police cars.

At 6pm, the Faculty of Law squat called for a demonstration at Propylaia, a central Square of Athens. Our estimation is that more than 20.000 people, mainly young people, participated in that demo. Lots of them, maybe more than 1.500, were walking "in and out" of the demo smashing banks and destroying the luxurious shops of the city centre. They started to destroy or loot the commodities almost from the first moment of the demo. The youths destroyed banks at Omonoia square and attacked more than half of the shops of Stadiou Avenue and Filellinon Avenue. Also, severe looting took place at the shops in the first blocks of Piraeus Avenue. People were walking slowly and nobody really tried to stop neither the attacks nor the looting. Some even stood by and cheered the attacking youths. At the same time, youths were also attacking the cops, the banks and the shops in various parts of the city all the way down to Syggrou Avenue, a street leading to the south of Athens. Up until now, the real extent of the damage caused to private property that night has not been estimated. The media says it amounts to 10 billion euros, which could be true since dozens of stores were attacked, looted or burnt down mainly by greek and immigrant "uncontrollable youths".

Although one could say that the greek youths (students and precarious workers) had the initiative and the immigrants followed by, we have to admit that it was very difficult to distinguish the one from the other in the streets. As far as immigrants are concerned, Albanians of second generation participated mostly in the attacks against cops and buildings and immigrants of other origin –mostly Afghans and Africans- confined themselves to looting. Riots and looting covered approximately half of the city centre. Although the police made several arrests that evening, it would be untrue to say that they could even think of controlling the situation, because there were so many people in the streets, acting in small groups of ten or twenty people.

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