

# Free Dimitris Koufontinas now!

*We reprint below a translation of the emergency statement issued by the Trotskyist Group of Greece and distributed at protests in defense of Dimitris Koufontinas, a leader of the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November (17N). Koufontinas, having been on a hunger strike, is close to death.*

*17N group, named after the date in 1973 when the military junta massacred students and workers at Athens Polytechnic, engaged in assassinations of representatives of Greek capitalism and US and British imperialism. For that, the vindictive ruling classes are determined to see him dead.*

\* \* \*

23 February—Dimitris Koufontinas has been on hunger strike since 8 January, demanding, as he writes in his letter, “to be returned to the basement of Korydallos [Prison], to the special wing built by the minister of repression himself, M. Chrysochoidis, to bury 17N, and where I spent 16 of the 18 years I have been in prison”. The Greek capitalist state, and behind it the US imperialists, are determined to murder him. **Free Dimitris Koufontinas and all the 17N prisoners now! Free all those arrested on demonstrations defending Koufontinas now!**


These demands are an elementary act of solidarity with radical activists victimised by the bourgeois state and are necessary for the defence of the workers movement and the left as a whole. Yet the miserable Greek left stands on the side of the murderous bourgeois vendetta against Koufontinas, *refusing* to call for his release.

The 17N group engaged in acts of individual terror such as the killing of representatives of the Greek bourgeoisie and its state apparatus, as well as representatives of US and British imperialism. As we wrote in the founding document of our section (“The Founding of the Trotskyist Group of Greece” [published in Greek, November 2004]):


“When the oppressed act against the bourgeoisie and its state, we defend them against capitalist repression; however, we oppose the desperate petty-bourgeois strategy of individual terrorism, which is antithetical to the task of rendering the proletariat conscious that it is the only class with the historic interest and social force to smash capitalist exploitation.”

At the same time, 17N shared the nationalist outlook of the Greek capitalists, as seen in their targeting of Turkish diplomats over the Cyprus question.

For Marxists, the targeting by 17N of those who administer the capitalist system of exploitation—which is responsible for barbaric acts against humanity worldwide—is not a crime against the working class. As proletarian



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revolutionaries, we oppose the strategy of individual terrorism even when it derives from a real, if misguided, impulse to defend the oppressed. It is a different matter with acts of terror targeting civilians, which are simply criminal. Terrorism is counterposed to the mobilisation of the masses, and it almost always gets innocent victims. As Trotsky wrote:

“A single isolated hero cannot replace the masses. But we understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance.... Not the lone avenger but only a great revolutionary mass movement can free the oppressed, a movement that will leave no remnant of the entire structure of class exploitation, national oppression, and racial persecution.”

—For Grynszpan (14 February 1939)

We condemn the wretched position of the KKE which slandered 17N as provocateurs in league with “foreign secret services operating in our country; either the CIA, Mossad or other imperialist states, but also the local EYP [National Intelligence Service]” (“The 17 November case ‘A series of unanswered questions’”, *Rizospastis*, 2 March 2003). The KKE uses the argument that the bourgeoisie exploits acts of individual terror to intensify repression of the workers movement as a pretext for not defending Dimitris Koufontinas and 17N against the bourgeois state, accusing them of offering to work on behalf of the bourgeoisie “to slander the people’s struggles, revolutionary ideology and practice, but also—under the guise of fighting against them—to bring about ‘terror laws’ which are ultimately turned against the people’s rights and the workers and people’s struggle” (Statement of the Press Office of the CC of the KKE, “On the treatment of Dimitris Koufontinas, convicted of participation in ‘17N’”, 18 February 2021).

The left groups (SEK [Socialist Workers Party], NAR [New Left Current], the rest of Antarsya etc.), wringing their hands over an unjust, anti-democratic policy, complain about violation of the penal code and discriminatory provisions for revenge and fight for the rule of law.

They not only refuse to demand freedom for Koufontinas but ask only that he be returned to a *different* dungeon, that of Korydallos.

Their demands are couched entirely in the framework of calling on the bourgeoisie to obey its own laws. Thus NAR, in a *Statement of its Press Office of NAR for Communist Liberation* titled: “For an end now to the vindictive, anti-democratic policy against D. Koufontinas” (18 January 2021), writes: “This transfer is not lawful even under ND’s new law (4760/2020)... *It constitutes a vindictive, cynical and criminal choice by the ND government*; a part of its entire anti-democratic and totalitarian policy to the detriment of democratic rights and civil liberties, expressed most violently against prisoners”.

Contrary to the illusions of the left, the bourgeois state exists *precisely* to imprison, crush and exterminate those who would challenge the rule of the capitalists. As Engels, Marx, Lenin and Trotsky all insisted: the capitalist state is nothing other than an instrument of organised violence—the core of which is special bodies of armed men—with which the capitalist ruling class oppresses the working class. The state cannot be reformed or forced to act in the interests of the workers and oppressed. It must be smashed through proletarian revolution and replaced with a workers state.

While it is true that ND [New Democracy] is exacting revenge against Dimitris Koufontinas, NAR once again embellishes Syriza—a capitalist party—against ND, promoting class-collaboration to “fight the right” while the only difference between them is that ND wants Koufontinas dead now while Syriza wants him to die a slow death in prison.

Against the illusions pushed by the reformist left that the state can be reformed, we fight to gather and train the core of a revolutionary workers party, a section of a reformed Fourth International. Our perspective demands internationalist unity of the working class in a revolutionary struggle against Greek capitalism and imperialism. ■

## International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

International Center: Box 7429 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA • Web site: [www.icl-fi.org](http://www.icl-fi.org)

### Spartacist League of Australia

Spartacist ANZ Publishing Co., PO Box 967,  
North Melbourne VIC 3051, Australia  
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### Spartacist League/Britain

Spartacist Publications, PO Box 42886, London N19 5WY, Britain  
[workershammer@btconnect.com](mailto:workershammer@btconnect.com)

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### Ligue trotskyste de France

Le Bolchévik, BP 135-10, 75463 Paris Cedex 10, France  
[ltfparis@hotmail.fr](mailto:ltfparis@hotmail.fr)

Τροτσκιστική Ομάδα της Ελλάδας (Trotskyist Group of Greece)  
Box 8274, Athens 10210, Greece • [spartacist@hotmail.com](mailto:spartacist@hotmail.com)

### Ireland

Spartacist Publications, Box 2944, 29 The Mall,  
Beacon Court Sandymount, Dublin 18, Ireland  
[spartacist.ireland@gmail.com](mailto:spartacist.ireland@gmail.com)

### Lega trotskista d'Italia

Walter Fidacaro, Ufficio Milano Cordusio, Casella postale 430,  
20123 Milano (MI), Italy • [red\\_sp@tin.it](mailto:red_sp@tin.it)

### スバルタシスト・日本グループ (Spartacist Group Japan)

PO Box 49, Akabane Yubinkyoku, Kita-ku, Tokyo 115-0091, Japan  
[sgj\\_icl@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:sgj_icl@yahoo.co.jp)

### Grupo Espartaquista de México

Escriba sólo: Ángel Briseño, Apdo. Postal 006, Admón. Postal 13,  
CP 03501, Ciudad de México, Mexico  
[je\\_contacto@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:je_contacto@yahoo.com.mx)

### Trotskyist League in Quebec and Canada

Collective Publications, C.P. 583, Succ. Place d'Armes,  
Montréal QC H2Y 3H8, Canada

[republique.ouvriere@gmail.com](mailto:republique.ouvriere@gmail.com) • [tl.workertribune@gmail.com](mailto:tl.workertribune@gmail.com)

### Spartacist/South Africa

PO Box 61574, Marshalltown, Johannesburg 2107, South Africa  
[spartacist\\_sa@yahoo.com](mailto:spartacist_sa@yahoo.com)

### Spartacist League/U.S

Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA • [vanguard@tiac.net](mailto:vanguard@tiac.net)