Global Day of Action on Military Spending: The Case of the Republic of Cyprus (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

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Campaign Briefing – April 2015

Global Day of Action on Military Spending:

The Case of the Republic of Cyprus

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Assembly for a Demilitarized Nicosia

Five years into the financial and economic crisis in Cyprus, and there is still an elephant in Nicosia that few are talking about. The elephant is the role of military spending in causing and perpetuating the economic crisis. As social infrastructure is being slashed, spending on weapon systems is hardly being reduced. While pensions and wages have been cut, the arms industry continues to profit from new orders, as well as outstanding debts.

Perversely, the voices that are protesting the loudest in Nicosia are the siren calls of nationalist politicians and military lobbyists, warning of a “disaster” in the case that any further cuts are made to military spending. This report shows that the real disaster has emerged from years of high military spending and corrupt arms deals. This dynamic contributed substantially to the debt crisis and continues to weigh heavy on future budgets. The power of the military-industrial lobby also makes any effective cuts less likely. This is perhaps most starkly shown in how the governments of the richest EU member states, while demanding ever higher sacrifices in social cuts, have been saying nothing and actually have been lobbying behind the scenes against military cuts because of concerns this would affect their own arms industry.

This report reveals how:

- High levels of military spending in a country that is now at the epicentre of the Eurozone financial crisis played a significant role in causing its debt crisis. Although Cyprus is considered to be the most recent casualty of the financial crisis within the Eurozone, it owes some of its debt troubles to a 50% increase in military spending over the past decade, the majority of

which came after 2004.
- The debts caused by arms sales were often a result of corrupt deals between government officials, but are being paid for by ordinary people facing savage cuts in social services.
- Military spending has been reduced as the country has been severely affected by the crisis, but the Republic of a Cyprus still has military spending levels comparable to or higher than ten years ago.
- When military spending cuts actually take place, there are cuts almost entirely on people – reductions in personnel, lower wages and pensions – rather than on arms purchases.
- While the richest countries within the Eurozone have insisted on the harshest cuts of social budgets by crisis countries to pay back debts, they have been much less supportive of cuts in military spending that would threaten arms sales.
- Continued high military spending has led to a boom in arms companies' profits and a further militarisation of our daily lives, while an even more aggressive push of arms sales is ignoring concerns on safeguarding human rights and reunifying the island.
- Investment in the military is the least effective way to create jobs, regardless of the other costs of military spending. At a time of desperate need for investment in job creation, supporting a bloated and wasteful military cannot be justified given how many more real-time jobs such money would create in areas such as public health, education and transport.

Despite the clear evidence of the cost of high military spending, nationalist politicians and military lobbyists continue to push a distorted and preposterous notion that defence cuts threaten the security of the country.

We believe by contrast, that at a time when the EU and Cyprus' agenda of permanent austerity faces ever-growing challenges, there is one area where both Europe and Cyprus could do much more to impose austerity. And that is the arena of military spending and the arms industry. A permanent reduction of military spending until the final dismantling of all armies based on the island, would save many more millions. Writing off dirty debts caused by arms deals concluded through bribes, would be a good first step to lay the bill for the crisis with those who helped cause it. Such measures would also prove that at a time of crisis, Cyprus prepared to invest in a future desired by its people, rather than its warmongers.

Due to its strategic position and natural resources, Cyprus has been for decades in the eye of the storm. The competition for domination and exploitation in the region of Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East has driven to numerous wars and conflicts. The authoritarian and totalitarian post-colonial regimes that were formed do not represent the interests of the people. We are in solidarity with every movement fighting towards social liberation and political emancipation from local and foreign sovereignty.

Cyprus is one of the most militarized areas on the planet. Those of us who live here, trapped for decades in a nationalist conflict, have allowed the power elites to exercise their authority and implement their interests in the broader area without any serious resistance. It is vital that the hegemony of nationalism and militarism breaks. We will be actively present in any effort to dismantle it.

In our view, militarisation not only strengthens nationalist ideologies and safeguards the division of the island, but also inevitably leads to more institutional discrimination and reinforces racism, sexism and patriarchy. In this – both literally and figuratively – barbed wire of power relations, militarisation supports arms trade and increases military expenditures. At the same time, in an era of a global capitalist crisis, the 'public debt' and 'national deficit' are growing, whilst wages and pensions are

being cut, and public expenditures on vital sectors, such as social welfare and environmental protection, are constantly reduced.

We consider these developments as a huge and continuous failure of the people of Cyprus, who adopted the nationalist narrative and militarist beliefs. By doing that, we were all pushed more and more into a long-term inter-communal conflict and consequently we accepted the status quo that was imposed by nationalist and imperialist forces. We have to understand that the ethnic – religious conflict and the geographical division are the perfect excuses for the rulers to maintain the same peculiar and extended 'state of exception'. This authoritarian and oppressive regime tries to expand its power and extend its dominance to every aspect of our daily lives. Simply invoking this 'state of exception' is enough to suspend our labour, social, political and environmental rights, as well as suppress class struggles and mobilizations of all insubordinate parts of the society, particularly those from the lower classes and marginal groups. In this extra-ordinary but long-established 'state of emergency', it is not only our rights that are being violated and ours freedoms that are neglected, but even the provisions of the 'constitutional legitimacy' and the principles of the 'rule of law' of the so-called 'liberal democracy' are suspended.

We firmly believe that the time has come for the people in Cyprus to join forces, mobilize and resist to the dominant nationalist ideologies, the escalating militarisation of our lives, the increasing military expenditure and the rise of far-right political parties. We are against all nationalist and imperialist armies, post-colonial military forces and alliances, as well as states' repressing mechanisms and authoritarian institutions. Nobody should be a soldier of power elites, never and nowhere; thus, we are not surrendering our lives to any master of capital and war.

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