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“Can’t pay? Don’t pay!”: Civil Disobedience Movements and Social Protest in Greece during the Memorandum Era

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This paper will address the issue concerning recorded groupings and convergences in an era of economic crisis between new social movements and social protest by some social groups in Greece the demands of which would not be coincided under normal conditions. In particular, we will explore the dynamics of consumer, citizen, worker movements and small business social protest that have been on the rise especially after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in May 2010 between the Greek government and the representatives of European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)¹. Many social movements grew in opposition to the neoliberal policy of the Government and the Troika at the same time when social strata and professional groups such as small business are reported to pursue radical social protest.

The trade union movement had a hard time organizing its resistance to the government’s policies due to the reluctance of its leadership to break its ties with PASOK, the political party in government and its bureaucratic structure and political culture. Another factor that burdens the trade union movement is the on-going schism between the Communist Party’s trade union fraction (PAME) and the rest political parties’ fractions on the issue of hegemony over the trade union movement. Furthermore, the intensification of the implementation of the neoliberal dogmas by the government and the employers has had heavy consequences on the workers (mass lay-offs, wage reductions, worsening terms of work and retirement, flexible employment practices, rising of unemployment rates). New unions covering new working strata mainly in the flexible

¹ The Memorandum of Understanding between the Greek government and the representatives of EC, ECB and IMF -known as “Troika”- provided the granting of a Loan amounting to 110 billion Euros in order for the country to face its debt crisis.

employment private sector of the economy challenge the mainstream trade unions' social dialogue policies in favor of more decentralized and radical forms of organization and strategy.

At the same time, Greek small shopkeepers and small business associations experiencing bad economic times due to the crisis which struck the country causing consumption decline are facing the perspective of collapse as more than four thousand small and very small retail shops close on a monthly basis. This situation provoked a strong protest movement the first of its kind in the world of commerce. The merchants' unions took to the streets using social movement tactics in order to spread their message **“We close only today before they close us down once and forever”**. They use publicity spots, put up posters on their shop facades and walls, and participate in marches, rallies and demonstrations. Moreover, they threaten to stop paying taxes as a sign of “civil disobedience”.

Beyond the trade union sector a whole social movement world is on the making. Public-private partnerships, which are government services or private business ventures funded and operating through a partnership of government and one or more private sector companies, have provoked a series of mobilizations against their pricing policies that have serious consequences on the rise of inflation and on peoples' lives. These movements have devised new strategies and tactics or renovated older one to fit to the new circumstances of decentralized struggles and electronic mass media (internet, social media and networks).

In this context, we will study the labour and professional union responses to the Memorandum policy and the degree of their effectiveness. We will also study two kinds of social movements that have emerged against the expensive and multiple toll stations in national highways and against the public transport companies' pricing policy. In both cases the movement borrows slogans from similar movements making similar demands in the past. Such a slogan is the title of Dario Fo's theatrical play “Can't pay? Don't pay!” **Our working hypothesis is that these movements are “products” of both the economic and political systemic crisis that allows the development of single-issue movements that may provoke wider social actions for the reform or the undermining of the system.**

Our research will focus on qualitative methods and techniques such as participant observation, field notes, reflexive journals, unstructured interviews and analyses of documents and materials.

1. A theoretical framework

“There is all the difference in the world between the criminal's avoiding the public eye and the civil disobedient's taking the law into his own hands in open defiance. This distinction between an open violation of the law, performed in public, and a clandestine one is so glaringly obvious that it can be neglected only by prejudice or ill will.” Hannah Arendt²

The term “Civil disobedience” is defined as “the knowing and deliberate violation of the law for vital social purpose”³ or “a political act involving disobeying governmental authority on grounds of moral objection, with the aim of promoting a just society”.⁴ The most widely accepted definition is that given by John Rawls: “civil disobedience is a public, non-violent and conscientious breach of law undertaken with the aim of bringing about a change in laws or government policies”.⁵ Civil disobedience is a symbolic or ritualistic violation of the law.⁶

In order to speak of civil disobedience we must refer to acts of persons who intentionally and publicly disobey and violate laws.⁷ The targeted laws may be objected and violated either because they are reckoned unjust or symbolically in order for the disobedient persons to draw attention to other causes. People violating unjust laws are acting neither out of self interest nor necessarily as revolutionaries in order to overthrow the whole political system but they act in the name of collective purposes in order to cancel unjust laws or policies. The fact that there may be some people who may act selfishly or in the name of revolution trying to prepare “revolutionary conditions” does not negate the moral character of “civil disobedience”.

There are some points that need further clarifications. “Civil disobedience” is neither just a matter of politeness in protesting nor necessarily of using absolutely non-violent methods.” Civil disobedience” is indeed a deliberately disruptive act which questions and challenges

² Arendt Hannah. (n.d.). Great-Quotes.com. Retrieved March 9, 2011, from Great-Quotes.com Web site: <http://www.great-quotes.com/quote/740071>

³ Howard Zinn, (1968) “Seven guidelines for civil disobedience” in *Disobedience & Democracy*, (New York: Random House Inc. pp. 119-122.

⁴ McLean Iain and McMillan Alistair (2009) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p. 77.

⁵ Rawls John (1969). "The Justification of Civil Disobedience." in Hugo Adam Bedau, (ed.), *Civil Disobedience: Theory and Practice*, New York: Pegasus Books, pp. 240–255.

⁶ Bedau Hugo Adam (ed.) (1991) *Civil Disobedience in focus*. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge.

⁷ Thoreau, Henry David (1991) “Civil Disobedience” in Hugo Adam Bedau, (ed.), *op.cit.* pp. 28-48.

social norms and established laws and policies. This means that citizens that disobey must also accept the penalties of the laws they are violating because they demonstrate that they respect the idea and the rule of law that constitute the political system. Moreover, accepting the responsibility for their actions disobedient citizens bring publicity to their causes. There is an objection to this: “If a specific act of civil disobedience is a morally justifiable act of protest, then the jailing of those engaged in that act is immoral and should be opposed, contested to the very end.”⁸ Moreover, violence is not always ineffective and immoral because there are significant issues at stake that cannot be left dragging. Nevertheless there is something to be clarified: there is “distinction between harm to people and harm to property”. Moreover, depending on the efficacy and the issue “depreciation (as in boycotts), damage, temporary occupation, and permanent appropriation” can be caused⁹

Civil disobedience is an important element of the democratic system of governance. It is an aspect of direct democracy and popular participation in the wider governing process. People feel free to comment and criticize straightforwardly the (unjust) laws, to fight for their repeal and establish new rules based on the idea of a “just society”. To make a religion of obedience to the law, i.e. to exalt the rule of law as an absolute is “the mark of totalitarianism” in a society “which has many of the attributes of democracy”.¹⁰ The right of disobedience to a bad law and a dangerous policy is the essence of democracy. The omega Article No. 120 of the Greek Constitution refers to disobedience as a duty of the citizens of a democratic polity: Observance of the constitution is entrusted to the patriotism of the Greeks who shall have the right and the duty to resist by all possible means against anyone who attempts the violent abolition of the Constitution.” This provision does not apply only in cases of foreign occupation or coups d’ état. “Civil disobedience” can be used as a political weapon when the legally elected government follows a policy that leads to attacking the essential principles of the Constitution which support the “social contract” between the government and the citizens.

The disobedient citizens emphasize the contradiction between the legal and the constitutional trying to convince the people (or the nation) that they act according to the dictates of their own consciousness in order to win the people’s (or the nation’s) conscious consent to the cause. It is not always the case that civil disobedience is justified only on the grounds of a future “just society”. According to an interpretation of the Kantian

⁸ Zinn H. (1968), *op.cit.* p.120.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.121.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

theory, civil disobedience may be justified by obeying reason not violent resistance against the unjust laws and policies.¹¹ The real act of opposition i.e. the selection to decline to conform, to say "no" to all those who hold or exercise power is crucial to a civilized society. It aims at ensuring the safeguarding of humanity as well as allowing the people to recover an authentic sense of self.¹²

Criticisms from radical and conservative points of view have been launched against the idea and practice of civil disobedience. The former express disapproval of what they assume as acceptance of the established political structure by civil disobedient. The latter believe that the most likely extension of civil disobedience as disorder, anarchy and chaos as a result of the exercise by the individuals of the right to breach any law they choose whenever they feel like. Liberal views of civil disobedience ground its integration into contractual theory on the principles of equal basic liberty of the citizens and equality of opportunity.¹³ Because society may not be a "perfectly just society" it is expected serious violations to take place. The obligation to obey the laws that have been agreed and inscribed in the constitution is not absolute, because particular unjust and antiliberal laws may be passed and enforced by the government. In this case it is a duty for the citizens to oppose the laws that create injustice and violate the basic right of liberty. The difference with the radical view is mainly in the non-violent nature of civil disobedience according to the liberal view because it is regarded as a mode of appealing to the sense of fundamental justice of the majority of the people. Moreover, it is regarded as a morally acceptable method to sustain the constitutional order in an imperfect society, since it actualizes the system's capacity for self-correction.¹⁴

2. Political Disobedience and Social Protest in Greece

The case of Greece in the recent years offers many examples of "civil disobedience", which is in great part a function of the "structures of political opportunities". This we could say is the case of Greece where the system has been tolerating and addressing demands concerning wages and pensions but systematically ignoring demands on quality of life, save

¹¹ Formosa Paul (2008) "'All politics must bend its knee before right': Kant on the relation of morals to politics". *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 34, no. 2 April., pp 1-25.

¹² Fromm Erich (2010) *On Disobedience: Why Freedom Means Saying "No" to Power*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

¹³ Rawls John (1971) *Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

¹⁴ Read more: [Civil Disobedience - Philosophic Status Today - Society, Justice, Rawls, Liberty, Theory, and Liberal](http://science.jrank.org/pages/8661/Civil-Disobedience-Philosophic-Status-Today.html#ixzz1GZG3t199) <http://science.jrank.org/pages/8661/Civil-Disobedience-Philosophic-Status-Today.html#ixzz1GZG3t199>

for the election periods when incumbent governments and political parties were trying to present an attractive governing program.¹⁵ Since 1974 when parliamentary democracy was restored in Greece following the collapse of the seven-year military dictatorship, the political parties covered almost the whole field of the civil society with a few exemptions such as the factory based trade unions, some unions of the banking sector as well as business associations. Many social mobilizations were dominated by the political parties except for the suddenly arising student and ecological movements¹⁶.

After the national election of October 1981 and the beginning of the period of socialist governance” by PASOK the two-party system was stabilized.¹⁷ Since then both governing parties have dominated to a high degree in the trade unions and the main social associations. It is only since the beginning of the 21st century that political opportunities for the trade unions and the other social movements have opened up again in order to claim higher degrees of autonomy and independence from political party domination. This was partly attributed to the on-going interparty conflicts in governing party PASOK between “modernizers” who dominated the government and “traditionalists” who were trying to hold the party under their control and criticized the government that was attempting to undermine the Greek Welfare State.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s the right wing opposition (New Democracy-ND) adopted the slogan of “Refoundation of the State” in order to gain electoral support from PASOK’s middle class constituencies. When ND came to the government, implemented a series of reforms and continued the policies of privatization of public sector enterprises and public education (attempt to legalize private universities through the amendment of Article 16 of the Constitution) etc. All these “reforms” faced fierce opposition not only by PASOK and left-wing parties, but also from inside its party factions in trade unions. Finally, on December 2008, immediately after the murder of 15-year high school

¹⁵ For the case of environmental issues, ecological movement and the party system in Greece, see Tsakiris Thanassis (1997) “Otan he alalos anoixis apokta fonin: To ekologiko kinima stin Ellada kai he epidrasi tou sta politika kommata” (“When the silent spring gets a voice: the ecological movement in Greece and its influence on political parties”). Master thesis at the Political Science and Public Administration Department of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

¹⁶ e.g. 1978-1980 occupations of universities against Law No. 815/1978 and the demonstrations against the construction of nuclear energy production plants during the same period

¹⁷ For a recent discussion on the Greek party system from a view that attributes to “bureaucratic clientelism” and “partitocrazia” the main cause of the Greek political system crisis see Lyrantzis Christos (2011) “Greek politics in the era of economic crisis: reassessing causes and effects” *GreeSE Paper No 45 Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe*. www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/.../pdf/GreeSE/GreeSE01.pdf

student Alexis Grigoropoulos by a member of the Special Police Force, a rebellion broke out against the increasing aggressiveness of the repressive apparatus of the state.¹⁸ In the rebellion high school pupils, university students and young precariously working people played the leading role in mass civil disobedience through demonstrations, occupations of schools and public buildings and rioting. During the rebellion, hundreds of members of new and older “precarious employment” trade unions, such as courier services, call centers called for civil obedience not only against the government’s policies but also against the “trade union bureaucracy” that, in their opinions, due to its commitment to social dialogue had integrated the labor movement into the political and economic systems not representing the working class any more.¹⁹ Moreover, the citizens were revolting against both parties due to the economic scandals involving members of their political personnel as well as significant members of the corporate elites (e.g. Siemens, transactions on real estate between the Church and the State-“Vatopedi scandal”). Subsequently, the structure of political opportunities opens up. The political system enters a period of intense crisis and political elites split as new political groups emerge, especially after the early elections.

3. Economic crisis in Greece, the IMF, the Troika, and the bailout policy

On the 4th of October the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) won the national elections from the sitting New Democracy (ND) government. For one more time the socialists with a member of the Papandreou political dynasty as prime minister were ascending to the government. Although we live in an era of “diminished expectations” people who voted PASOK hoped that the new government would at least restore their incomes that were cut back due to the ND government’s incomes policy combined with the steady rise of inflation rate. PASOK’s election campaign was dominated by the slogan “money exists” referring to the ND government’s claim that the country should enter an era of austerity politics due to financial stringency. The political, economic and social events that followed shattered PASOK government’s image. In order to face the crisis, PASOK government invited the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with the political support of the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB), to solve the debt

¹⁸ Douzinas Costas (2009) “What we can learn from the Greek riots”, *The Guardian*, 9/1/2009. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/09/greece-riots#start-of-comments>

¹⁹ Tsakiris Athanasios (2010) “The Greek December 2008 Uprising and the Role of the New Trade Unions” 15th *Alternative Futures and Popular Protest Conference*, Manchester Metropolitan University, 29-31 March

problem. The result was that the Troika (committee with representatives of IMF, EU, and ECB) agreed to lend the Greek government. The bailout policy imposed by the Troika works in favour of French and German banks. At the time the bailout agreement was signed, French banks had \$80bn in exposure to Greece and strong presence in the Greek banking market,²⁰ followed by Germany at \$45bn. Within Germany, Hypo Real Estate has the largest exposure at €9.1bn. and Commerzbank held €4.6bn in Greek bonds. The German public-sector banks known as Landesbanken held billions of euros in Greek bonds.²¹ Thus it is German and French banks gain from this debt crisis. The German case is so typical of this. Germany's industrial organization is highly competitive and it is supported very well by a great export policy that sells its products to the other European countries that cannot compete effectively against it in terms of devaluation. A weak currency, in this case the Euro, is for the German capital a precondition for its successful competition in the global markets especially against the USA. This means that German banks must be able to finance the country's exports and an indebted Greek economy was an uncertain situation for these banks which hold a great part of Greece's debt.²² In order to secure the Banks from the risk of Greece's default the Troika is implementing the most neoliberal policies that have been imposed in Greece during the post-war period. Since the stability and the profit of the German and French banks is the only criterion it is clear that stemming Greece's debt crisis is less an act of charity than of self-interest.²³

A very clear example of socializing the losses and privatizing the profit has been the bank bailouts. Since 2008 governments throughout the world have organized bank rescues in order to restore the profitability of the banking sector. These bank rescues required a huge flow of public money to the banks, which was borne by taxpayers and the outcome was an enormous expansion in public borrowing. The Greek as well as the Irish

²⁰Crédit Agricole revealed that its total sovereign debt exposure to Greece was €3.8 bn but the French bank is also burdened with a heavy private sector exposure to Greece in its ownership of Emporiki Bank. Société Générale was similarly exposed with a half-share in Greece's Geniki Bank while SocGen's sovereign Greek exposure was €3 billion. Mortished Carl (2010) "French banks catch cold amid fears of exposure in Greece" *The Sunday Times* 8/5/2010

http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/banking_and_finance/article7119587.e

²¹ Dow Jones Newswires (2010) "French and German banks could bear brunt of a Greece default", 28 Apr 2010 <http://www.efinancialnews.com/story/2010-04-28/french-german-banks-bear-greece-default-brunt>

²² Walayat Nadeem (2010) "Greece Economic Depression Resulting in Inflation not Deflation Surge" <http://www.fxstreet.com/fundamental/analysis-reports/greece-economic-depression-resulting/2010/05/06/>

²³ "Acropolis now", *Economist*, 29/4/2010
http://www.economist.com/node/16009099?story_id=16009099

government rushed to the recovering of their respective banking system. With that amount of tax payers' money that the Greek government surrendered to the banks it could have decided to assume control of the financial sector. However, the leading political parties did not do that. They further decided when the IMF loan gets in to grant additional millions to the banks. Banks are contributing to the deterioration of the public debt problem because they grant loans to the Greek government with higher interest rates. The banking recovered but not the Greek people. It must be mentioned that out of the 110 billion euros that the Greek government has borrowed from the EU and the IMF, 78 billion have to do with sustaining the banking system.

The Troika undertook to play the role of the real «Governor» of the country and to lead the Greek government to the implementation of the Memorandum's policy. As many analysts argued this practically is a violation of basic constitutional articles such as articles No. 1 and No. 28 para 2 because the government is guided by foreigners and has adopted policies that are in opposition to the interests of working people as to social insurance, labor relations and living standards. Civil servants saw their 13rd and 14th salaries cut.²⁴ Moreover, pension amounts were also reduced and age limits for retirement were increased. Concerning the labor relations, company collective agreements are supported instead of the sectoral and industry-wide collective labour agreements in the name of saving jobs as well as for reasons of competitiveness. There is a fear that all these herald the final passage to the establishment of individual labor contracts that even the employers' organizations of SMEs reject as a prospect.

According to the latest report of the Bank of Greece (February 2011), the reduction of nominal average gross wages is estimated at 4.7% in contrast to an increase of 4.6% that was recorded in 2009. For 2011 it is predicted that the reduction will be 2.7%.²⁵

The consequences of the Memorandum policy's implementation were heavy for large groups of workers, such as part-time and temporary workers under precarious employment conditions, unemployed workers and at the beginning the civil servants. According to the 3rd Revised Memorandum and the state budget, unemployment rose to 12.1% from 9.1% one year earlier and it was predicted that unemployment would reach 14.8% in 2012. However, on 31/12/2010 unemployment stood at 14.8% up 0.9% compared to November 2010 when unemployment had sky-rocketed to 13.9% as against 10.6% on November 2009 and 13.5%

²⁴ Benefits including Christmas, Easter, and Vacation Leave allowances amounting to 2 monthly salaries (these allowances were established in the past in order to complement low monthly wages).

²⁵ <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=259049>

on October 2009. The relevant figures for October 2010 reveal that unemployment increased very rapidly as on September 2010 unemployment stood at 12.6%. Employees and workers who have not yet been driven to unemployment submit to the employers' force and accept to work in bad quality jobs under precarious conditions. At the same time, new categories of temporary employment are created and expand, such as agency workers (rented employees) and apprentices. The young people have a hard time trying to find a job to earn their living: up to the age of 22 years less than 50% report that they had a work experience and among them 40.5% report that they sometime found a temporary full time job. Moreover, 30.7% of university degree holders report that they found a job after four years and more from their graduation and 15.5% report that they hadn't found a job yet.

In the meantime the deflation policy that was supposed to cause the reduction of prices in products and services in parallel with the reduction of wages did not prove efficient. Comparing the General Consumer Price Index for January 2011 with that for January 2010 we can see an increase by 5.2% as against 2.4% between January 2010 and January 2009. In combination with unemployment and wage reductions, expensive products and services prevent to a great degree the increase of consumption (recently we saw reduction of consumption even during the sales period) and leads to the closure of commercial stores, to further increase of unemployment and under employment in flexible labor relations. According to research conducted in November 2010 by the Institute for Commerce and Services of the National Confederation of Hellenic Commerce, 4,000 shops close down every month causing both fiscal and social problems. The Institute for Commerce and Services between 25 February and 7 March 2011 conducted another research that revealed that 20% of the shops in Greece have closed down²⁶.

In view of the debt crisis that affects almost all sectors in the Greek economy both public sector and private sector unions had to revise their previous strategies of social dialogue and compromising politics. The Greek government's policy was to turn to the IMF with neither searching for alternative methods for the administration of the public debt within the framework of the EU nor trying to proceed to talks for the prolongation of the debt repayment period and similar solutions. The requirements of this solution inscribed in the Memorandum²⁷ imposed by

²⁶ www.esee.gr

²⁷ See: 1) International Monetary Fund (2010) "Greece—memorandum of economic and financial policies", 3/5/2010. Available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr10111.pdf> 2)

the Troika were the implantation of a very strict austerity economic program, the further deregulation of labor relations, and the privatization of public enterprises (banks, energy, telecommunications, ports, etc). The majority of the unions' officers who are mainly members and high-ranking executives of the governing party as well as those who are members of the official opposition conservative party (New Democracy) prioritize "social dialogue" as their main strategic goal.

This strategy is regarded by many trade unionists, not only from the traditional and radical left, at least as unsuccessful due to the aggressiveness of the government's policy and the employers' impatience for profitability not considering the needs of their employees. Typical of this employers' aggressiveness is the president of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV, Commercial and Industrial Companies) who in a frenzy of greed called the Minister of Labor to move more aggressively in implementing Troika's proposals²⁸. The SME's business association (ESEE and GSEVEE respectively) present an exception to the employers' aggressiveness. For example, the merchant and craftsmen unions experience the burdens of the economic crisis since their profits have been falling rapidly due to the decrease of the purchasing power of workers and employees.²⁹ The latter face massive lay-offs and wage losses. Prices of basic goods (food, education, health, transportation etc.) have risen and inflation stands at 5.2%.³⁰ Bazaars, flea markets, and cheap Chinese products are now the "main street" characteristic features. Despite this tension between industrialists and bankers on the one side and SMEs and workers on the other the big unions and the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) signed a three-year collective labor agreement with 0% wage increases for the first year in the name of maintaining jobs. Thus, the majority of the first and second-degree unions (federations and labor centers) were left to fight against the second reform imposed by the Troika's memorandum that is the social security bill. During the period between February and July 2010 several one-day general strikes were organized mainly by public employees' unions

International Monetary Fund (2010) "Greece: Letter of Intent, Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies, Technical Memorandum of Understanding, and Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality" 6/8/2010 Available at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2010/grc/080610.pdf> 3) International Monetary Fund (2010) "Greece: Letter of Intent, Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies, and Technical Memorandum of Understanding" 8/12/2010 Available at <http://www.imf.org/External/NP/LOI/2010/grc/120810.pdf>

²⁸ See Mr. Daskalopoulos In favor of public employees' lay-offs (In Greek) 16/11/2010 <http://www.zoomnews.gr/?p=61320>

²⁹ "4,000 SMEs close down every month" Newspaper *Avgi*, 11/11/2010 <http://www.avgi.gr/ArticleActionshow.action?articleID=580583>

³⁰ "December inflation: Greece ranks third in Europe" Newspaper *Vima*. 14/1/2011 <http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=18&artid=378239&dt=14/01/2011#ixzz1By8zvIOh> "

(ADEDY is their confederation) and GSEE which were unsuccessful protests because they were not incorporated in a strategic plan for escalating the struggle towards the overthrow of the government's policies. Workers and employees were disappointed and with the exception of the huge demonstration on May 5th, the strikes were not accompanied by mass marches or occupations and other protest activities. As a result, for the time being, the main way for the majority of workers and employees to express their dissatisfaction against the government's and the employers' policies is through elections. On November 7 and 14 at the regional and local elections, new political formations created by former and existing members of PASOK gained a great part of PASOK's votes on a "Down With the Memorandum" political platform, mainly in the Attiki Region where the majority of voters live. A great number of voters, coming mainly from the working class and the unemployed, abstained.³¹ This kind of worker electoralism is a long-term historical political phenomenon in Greece, since the post-WW II period. Trade unions went through hard times during this period (lay-offs, exiles, expatriations or/and incarcerations of trade unionists, union-busting by governments and employer-driven thugs etc) leading them to seek protection by left-wing and political center parties in exchange for their submission to the party's policy goals. Following the 1974 regime change, this condition did not change. Even New Democracy created its own trade union factions when it lost government power in 1981.³² With a few exceptions such as the new unions of precariously working people, this is the prevailing order in the Greek union sector.

4. New Types of Movements

These new unions frequently use types of civil disobedience such as sit-ins, building occupations, even mass hunger strikes. The unions of courier services workers, fast-food delivery workers, telecommunication sector employees, call-center part-time employees, booksellers etc frequently resort to sit-ins, street and gate blockades, building occupations as a way to press the authorities and their employers without going on strike which costs too much in a time of economic crisis.³³

³¹ At the regional elections national abstention rose to 39.12% on the first round and to 54,32% on the second round. At the municipal elections, especially Municipality of Athens in the first round abstention rose to 56.95% and to 65.77%. Available at [http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/dn2010/public/index.html#{"page": "main"}](http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/dn2010/public/index.html#{)

³² See Tsakiris.Th. (2006) *Bank employees' trade unionism in Greece: 1974-1993*. PhD Thesis at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Department of Political Science and Public Administration.

³³ See Tsakiris Ath. (2010), op.cit.

Thousands of contract municipal workers occupied public buildings and City Halls in demand for contract renewal and/or permanent employment. The cases of the City of Athens and that of the City of Ioannina are the most striking ones.

On the 23rd of January 2008 at 8:00 am, more than 100 passengers of the Chalkida-Athens train line refused to pay the fare, grousing and protesting against frequent daily delays. The trainmaster ordered the immobilization at the station of Menidi where a police squad certified the identity cards of those passengers who refused to pay the fare. A post on an alternative radical website informed its readers that finally the policemen removed two passengers from the train. That was an early act of civil disobedience against the policy of devaluation of the public railroads that caused problems to working people who were discomforted due to the delays. The author of the post raised a question: “Should we maybe develop seriously a struggle of this type?”³⁴ The answer was provided a few months later when car drivers³⁵ stopped paying toll fares driving from Korinthos to Patra (and vice-versa) on a highway that does not meet the criteria set by the European Commission.³⁶ After the national elections of the 4th October 2009 with the economic crisis worsening many people took the initiative to form local committees in order to organize a new social movement against the governmental policies that caused further economic pains for a great part of the society that could not stand to bear the burdens of the crisis. A very recent paper argues that this movement can be seen as “an expression of social dissatisfaction and frustration caused by the severe measures introduced by a government which had no clear mandate to do so.” In this sense “it is a clear manifestation of a legitimacy crisis whose effects are difficult to foresee.”³⁷

This is where the “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” movement comes in.

The “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” Struggle Committees are open assemblies organized on a direct democracy basis, where we discuss, bring out the issues and organize actions in order to support and claim our needs and rights. We deny the society of “people-commodities” and we demand that all social goods be

³⁴ http://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=818117 and http://www.skai.gr/master_story.php?id=71812

³⁵ <http://news24gr.blogspot.com/2009/10/2.html>

³⁶ DIRECTIVE 1999/62/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 June 1999 on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures Available at http://www.asecap.com/pdf_files/Eurovignettedirective1999-EN.pdf

³⁷ See Lyrintzis Chr. (2011), *op.cit.* p. 25.

offered free-of-charge to each employed or unemployed person, young or pensioner. We self-organize and fight for a society where each will contribute according to his/her abilities and will enjoy according to his/her needs.³⁸

The “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” movement contains numerous active organizations and groups of activists. These organizations and groups coordinate their efforts through committees which are open to every citizen who is interested to participate in the movement. Thus the social movement functions as a network of allied organizations and individuals interacting in order to achieve their policy goals or/and achieve cultural transformations at the societal level.³⁹ Their literature informs the citizens about the origins of the problems. Leaflets, flyers, bulletins, and newspapers produced by the local “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” committees are printed and distributed to the citizens who use the public transportation vehicles, the highways and the hospital services. The issues that occupy their members have to do with the rising prices of the public goods and services such as:⁴⁰

- rise of the prices of public transportation tickets,
- increase of the number of toll gates in public highways
- increase in toll gate fees
- imposition of fees for hospital visits

The audience of the movement seems to be the whole working class: “We are an open initiative from below aiming at creating a workers’ Front from below and in the Struggles. We hold with every worker and every collective worker’s claim in the direction of the satisfaction of our needs and for our rights. Contact us.”⁴¹

The government’s response was contradictory once more. The first announcements made by the government provide that denial to pay the ticket in mass transport vehicle will consist a penal offence while denial to pay toll fares will consist a violation of the Road Traffic Code punished with a fine up to 200 euros.⁴²

³⁸ <http://denpliriono.wordpress.com/about/>

³⁹ On regarding a social movement as a network, see Della Porta Donatella and Diani Mario (2006) *Social Movements. An Introduction*. Malden MA and Oxford UK:Blackwell Publishing.

⁴⁰ <http://denpliriono.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/denpliriono-press.pdf>

⁴¹ <http://denpliriono.wordpress.com/>

⁴² <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.ellada&id=250846>

In the middle of January 2011 the government was nervous. There were messages that after the tolls time had come for urban transport. Members of the groups “Akrivia Stop” (“Stop Expensiveness”) and “Epivates Thessalonikis” (“Thessaloniki Passengers”) had already proceeded to symbolic occupations of buses proposing to the passengers to stop validating their tickets at the special machines. The Ministry of Infrastructures, Transport and Networks conducted a research revealing that 40% of the passengers either travel illegally or do not validate their tickets mainly in buses. Many passengers take advantage of the single ticket and its validity for a 90-minute travel in order to hand it over to an incoming passenger and everyone is legal if the inspector checks the tickets. This can be seen as a very low key social solidarity movement. The early response of the government to the “free rider problem” was to either use ticket inspectors more frequently or to establish the “electronic ticket”. The latter is expected to be introduced at the end of 2011 through the Public Private Partnership system.⁴³

On the 4th of February 2011, the passengers and commuters in Athens and Thessaloniki did not validate their tickets. The first Pan-Hellenic day of mass civil disobedience is a political event that reveals a strong social movement.

As mentioned above the general strike and mass demonstration of May 5 was the peak of the mobilization of the unions during the recent period trying to prevent the government from signing the Memorandum. The unsuccessful struggle of the trade union movement to prevent the passage by the Parliament of the laws that instituted the Memorandum as state policy opened the way for alternative communication strategies to social movements such as the “Can’t pay, Don’t pay” movement. The use of the Internet and the social networks such as Facebook and Twitter became a major factor in the mobilization. Yiannis Albanis, a member the European Social Forum, said to one of the largest circulated Sunday (at that time it also circulated daily) newspaper that “Our aim is to provoke similar mobilizations and practical demonstrations of solidarity from the working people from all the countries of Europe and beyond”. To achieve this goal ESF in Greece opened an account on Facebook under the name “Can’t pay, won’t pay. Solidarity to the people of Greece.” The impact of the account was so great that in less than two hours it crossed the Greek network’s borders and welcomed visits and friendship requests from at least 870 persons from the UK, Hungary, Germany and Spain. “From the first moment the page became the centre of attraction and mobilization with substantial results. Tomorrow, on the day of the all-workers rallies, there will be protest and solidarity gatherings in Berlin, Bilbao Budapest,

43 http://www.express.gr/news/ellada/428144oz_20110302428144.php3

and London. As for the choice to use the Internet this was made because it “has become consciousness to all those who are active against the institutions of globalization such as the IMF and the World Bank all this time. It is a tool that goes beyond borders and passes by the logic of the traditional Mass Media (...) but “the Internet does not substitute in any case gatherings strikes or demonstrations. It feeds the interest in politics and stimulates individuals and groups to exchange ideas and views.”⁴⁴

Allies and friends

Left-wing parties are supposed to be the friendliest to social movements political parties. Nevertheless, there is a great controversy on the autonomy and independence of the former from the latter. Classical Marxists give priority to the labor movement on the production side denying the plurality of social movements as political actors, namely all movements that do not recognize the avant-guard of the working class. This goes hand-in-hand with the view of the political party (in this case the Communist Party of Greece) as the unique political organization of the working class subsuming all other contradictions under its political scheme of “Laiki Exousia” (“People’s Power”)

Nevertheless, “reality” sometimes is cunning. The success of the “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” movement in mobilizing numbers of people throughout the country is clear. This fact made the leadership of the party to embrace the “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” movement but, as in the cases of the labor and the other social movements, it created its own organizations and intervenes politically on its own. The Communist Party’s candidate for the Attiki Region in the 2010 Regional Elections, Mr. Thanassis Pafilis, stated: “I’ll say it simply; the people have “flipped out” by now with all these things they see and this is expressed impulsively by some people. One could say that this is a militant attitude. However, if there is not any organized, mass disobedience and indiscipline, which will coupled with a political proposal, it will run out of steam. (...) Of course you cannot denounce such activist actions that express a tendency which is now being formed in the society.”⁴⁵

The parties of renewing and radical left have embraced the movement. However, their political presence and intervention is different than that of

⁴⁴ “Greece sighs in the Facebook: The citizen’s anger against the measures is expressed in the social networking webpages” (Sto Facebook he Ellada anastenazei: Stis istoselides koinonikes diktyosis apotyponetai he orgi ton politon gia ta metra), *Vima*, 4/5/2010,

<http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=329456>
⁴⁵ <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=248372>

the Communist Party which functions under the umbrella organization called PAME (All Workers Militant Front).⁴⁶ The members of these parties act on their own in these movements without a central guidance or special organization. As a member of “Thessaloniki Passengers said to us: “The movement is shaped far from the parties’ guidance so that it can avoid possible political exploitation of its struggles. Individuals organized in parties participate in the movement and its committees codetermining and acting within the framework of the collective decisions. We welcome political support from parties, trade unions, and social organization up to the point that they don’t attempt to manipulate the decisions of the movement.”⁴⁷ A member of the Movement against Tolls in Northwestern Attiki confirms that “the citizen’s groups that are self-organized are multi-color. In any case, that does not mean they are non-political. Their decisions are taken through open assemblies. It is a political reaction against the anomy of authority as well as against manipulation by political parties and trade unions. They came to cover a gap, a political deficit which engendered all these scandals we experienced the recent years from the Olympic Games and Siemens, the structured bonds, the Vatopedi monastery, and, of course, the assignment of the national highways, a public social good, to the contractors.” A member of “Stop Expensiveness” ascertains another dimension of the problem: “What we hear from the people is that they show disdain for the trade union movement as well as lack of trust for the left, which they hold responsible for not fulfilling their anticipations just when many citizens were searching for the left as a last resort”.⁴⁸

The “Can’t Pay, Don’t Pay” movement has to care for the legal consequences of its members’ “civil disobedience” activities. For this reason volunteering lawyers form teams to offer legal support to the movement and its activists. An example is the legal team of the “Thessaloniki Passengers” group which publishes instruction on what an activist must do when he/she faces the police during an act of “civil disobedience” such as denial to pay for the bus ticket or a call to the passengers to resist ticket controls.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The Executive secretariat of PAME called the people to a Pan-Hellenic mobilization on February 18, 2011 demanding free tolls and blocking of the ticket validation machines in subway stations and buses. <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.ellada&id=250910>

⁴⁷ Interview with Ms Stavroula Poulimeni, journalist, post-graduate student at the Political Science Department of the Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki, member of “Thessaloniki Epivates”

⁴⁸ <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=257095>

⁴⁹ <http://www.alterthess.gr/content/%CF%84%CE%B9-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%89-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CE%BD-%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%B5%CE%B3%CF%87%CE%BF-%CF%87%CF%89%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%83->

5. Social protest by SME and SME s associations

The increase of “padlocks” and the unprecedented reaction of small merchants

In the context of theoretical debate it is a priori presumed that the political stance and behaviour of small merchants and small entrepreneurs is determined as conservative; furthermore, special emphasis has been placed on their electoral alignment with fascist or extreme-right political parties. In contrast with the political behaviour of small merchants and entrepreneurs in other societies determined as conservative, their Greek colleagues seemed to differentiate themselves for a long period of time. Until 2000 the differentiation of their political behaviour was not limited only at their interest in politics. Greek small merchants were locating themselves in the political centre or/and in the left.

However, since the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, we can trace a number of new characteristics for this especially dense social category in the Greek society. Very recently the big economic crisis afflicted the commercial activity of small commerce and of small enterprises in general. The very rapid establishment of multinational commercial enterprises, multispaces and of course big-box stores (megastores) has led the small businesses to a dead-end. “Padlocks” are increasing daily as well as the dead ends where their business and personal lives seem to affect radically fixed political stances and behaviours.

National Confederation of Hellenic Commerce (ESEE) and local Merchant Associations participated in two general national strikes organized by the trade unions (15/12/2010 and 23/2/2011) by closing their shops, while in various consultation meetings, the positions they put forward approached those of the workers. They used the following forms of mobilization:

- protest marches,
- shop closing,
- creation of advertising spots,
- printing posters with their demands and covering street walls with these posters.

<http://epibates-thess.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2011-03-11T10:3A01%3A00%2B02%3A00&max-results=7> and http://www.babylonia.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3021&Itemid=

In some cases, seeing the “padlocks” increasing they search for ways to enter the “Can’t Pay? Don’t Pay!” movement. Thus they proposed for a period of time to stop paying VAT so that the government “feels” and realizes their value.

The same goes for the owners of small coffee-shops, bars and restaurants in the centre of Athens concerning the ban on smoking in the shops. Aiming at the continuation of their businesses’ operations they decided to “disobey” the smoking ban law. More than 1,000 enterprises proceeded to the creation of an informal organization aiming at not only to permit smoking but to not pay the fines that will be imposed on them due to their decision.

6. Conclusions

The above offer us the opportunity to show that in Greece in the Memorandum era there are new political phenomena which we must study in a more systematical manner.

Some preliminary conclusions may be drawn for the time being:

- Up to a certain point some institutional actors such as the representatives of the SMEs and their organizations converge with the non-institutional actors, such as the “Can’t Pay? Don’t Pay!” movement and its unofficial groups that function as autonomous and independent organizations.
- New movements use the “civil disobedience” method causing splits in the political cohesion of the top political elite and the government. In the other cases the movements exploited the split of the political elites (the case of contract municipal workers) and expanded the political opportunities (movement vs. rises of price of tolls, buses).
- Information technology systems such as the Internet and the social networks like Facebook and blogs played a very crucial role in the expansion and mobilization of the “Can’t Pay? Don’t Pay!” groups.
- There is a tendency for partisan dealignment which is still nascent in terms of voting and can be seen mainly in public opinion surveys and local elections. Nevertheless, this tendency is clear in terms of social movement activity.