



About Bank Robbery

Yiannis Dimitrakis

November 23, 2009

Translators' note: The interview below was published in an Athens paper today (November 1st). It contains some very powerful words by a comrade who has managed to deal with the barbarity of incarceration with endless dignity, sobriety and the will to keep fighting. Our warmest greetings to Yiannis Dimitrakis and all other victims of the incarceration machine: until all are free, none of us truly is.

The journalist's introduction: For the police, he is a member of the gang of the "robbers in black". He was arrested during a bank robbery and convicted to a 25-year sentence. A few days ago, the Ministry for Citizen Protection set a price of 600,000 euros on the heads of the rest of the gang, at the same time arguing that they are not only robbers but also members of terrorist groups. Yiannis Dimitrakis, an anarchist, speaks for the first time from the prison of Domokos where he is incarcerated. He talks about his comrades on the run, the recent attack on the police station of Ayia Paraskeui in Athens, the group "Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire", while he also responds to the minister for Citizen Protection, Michalis Chrysohoidis, who recently declared: "we are at war".

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During the bank robbery of January 17th, 2006, where you were arrested, another three people (Simos and Marios Seisidis and Grigoris Tsironis) got away – and a few days ago, these three had a prize of 600,000 put on their heads by the minister of Citizen Protection, Mr. Chrysohoidis. Do you believe that anyone will step forward to supply information?

Indeed, the police force, some squalid hack writers and some permanent guests of TV shows together with the minister of Public Order (and not of “Citizen Protection”, the government’s new name of preference for it) have set up an ideal scene for would-be scalp hunters. It is also a fact that the administrators of political authority would always try to form within society a mentality for informants and people snitching upon one another – sometimes with threats, other times with all sorts of rewards. Luckily, the consciousness-bearing greek society (that is, the one that recognises the cause for all her troubles in the face of the government terrorists or the financial elites and not in the face of three wanted anarchists), has historically resisted such practices and this, I believe, will happen this time around as well. However, because there are and will also be aspiring Inspector Clouseau’s and ingenious Agatha Christie’s, I would like to tell them that many have fell in love with informing but no-one has ever loved the informant.

Do you believe that their arrest is near?

That I do not know and I wish that it never happens. What I do know is that if they do get arrested the unemployed are not going to find a job; salaries will not increase nor, finally, will anyone who struggles from dawn to dusk (running around like a slave between one, two and even three jobs) see anything change in their lives.

Do you believe they will surrender without a fight?

I believe that a “fight” in its narrow definition, that is, an exchange of bullet rounds, will not take place. Because they will never get arrested. I know and I am sure that they fight everyday to remain free. Why, you see, humans love freedom.

What would you do if you were in their position?

I would do exactly the same. I would also avoid my arrest, which given our situation would translate into my most certain conviction for the offence committed on January 16, 2006 – that is, when the robbery of the National Bank in Athens took place.

What kind of message would you send them from prison?

They already know they have my friendship and my love. So, I would tell them something that Nikos Kazantzakis once said: “I feel as if we are banging our heads against iron bars. Many heads are going to be smashed, but one day the iron bars will be smashed, too”.

In your opinion what purpose is served by putting a price on their head?

I believe that the move to put a price on their head is part of the public relations planning of the ministry of Public Order, to contribute to the image put forward by the government: that it delivers. Unfortunately, this plan directly involves militarisation, with many units of police in Exarcheia and also with the raking up of past cases of armed struggle, as the minister himself said – which then leads to putting a price on the three comrades’ heads. Do not forget that the evidence they provide for their involvement in urban guerilla groups is no more than media items that have themselves been circulating via “leaks” from the police headquarters to certain newspapers during the past six months. For me all this is a communication trick and maybe the setting up of an excuse for the operational inability of the police to find people involved in dynamic actions. Remember this: in the future we might even hear excuses such as “if we cannot even find the fugitives, who are definitely terrorists, how are we supposed to clear up the imbroglio of armed struggle?”

So you want to say that the government creates terrorists...

That is the only thing that is certain. They have been doing it for years now. That is the standard tactic of the government, with its only aim being to prove it can deliver.

Do you consider the recent terrorist attack against the Police Station of Ayia Paraskevi as a response to putting a price on the heads of the three wanted anarchists?

Those who did this are the most fit to answer your question with a communique. My own opinion is invalid. You are better off asking some of your co-journalists, who not only seem to know everything, they also seem to know very well how to judge and convict. They have become judges, prosecutors and attorney generals at once.

There is information leaked out from the police that yourself and your alleged accomplices are not simple robbers, but you also participate in terrorist groups. What do you have to say to that?

Look: The only things we have not been accused of through these infamous “leaks” is drug dealing, trafficking, rape of minor girls and worshipping the devil. I know that many creative minds in the police headquarters are aroused with the combination of all these and I would honestly like to apologise to disappoint them by telling them these kind of things only happen in the Hollywood films they watch and the books they read.

According to the police you belong to the gang of the “robbers in black”. What is your response?

The “robbers in black” is an unfortunate and imaginative journalistic or police description that has no real base and that keeps being used by the media despite the fact that in the trial that took place it collapsed entirely. This, in the same way that even today they attribute to me seven robberies even though they know I have been acquitted for six and talk of unbelievable sums I am supposed to have in my possession, even though the court acknowledged the money belonged to the anarchist scene. All this, finally, at the time when they know that the spectacular scuffle they describe never took place and especially concerning the three friends and comrades for which they have issued arrest warrants with evidence that in my eyes seems ridiculous. And in any case, we should say something else that derives from common sense: CCTV in banks is usually of older technology and only records two colours, black and white.

What would you respond to his recent statement, “we are at war”?

At first reading, someone could come to think that Mr Chrysohoidis’ statement concerns exclusively people that take part in armed attacks against state or other targets. However, a closer reading of the actions of previous governments would reveal that the war in question is launched at all times against the most vulnerable social classes. We have been at war for many years now. They just won’t admit it. I am not sure what purpose is served by these war cries behind the security of ministerial offices and scores of security guards.

Who shouldn’t sleep peacefully in Greece from now on?

Exactly the same people who should not have slept peacefully before either.

Your court of appeals case is on December 9th. How do you see things forming up for you within such a tense climate?

Seeing the result of the initial trial and the stance of justice against all prisoners, I cannot really say I hold too much hope. That said, I will try to fight my struggle with my lawyers’ assistance.

Is there anything you regret?

Every decision and choice I make I do so after much thought and throughout the principles and values I hold. These I am prepared to defend with my own life. Until the end.

How do you see your life after?

Through the philosophical stance “Carpe diem”. Or else, seize the day...

Robbers, you might know, tend to go to banks dressed in dark clothing, especially during the winter – they tend to avoid the appearance of a folk singer in a live club, for example.

You justified your participation in the robbery where you were arrested by talking of an act of “expropriation”: What is the difference between an expropriation and a common robbery?

The difference is made by the subject of the action, even if for me the two terms are as detached as politicians are from real life. For a person to name their action “expropriation” they need nothing more than to pass over from their natural reaction against the conditions they are faced with, to the conscious revolutionary position: which is no other than the struggle against the powerful of this world. The difference is signified by the subject of the action.

The bank that you robbed was later targeted with consecutive arson attacks and was eventually forced to close. What this a revenge that some took in your name?

First of all, I do not know if that particular bank closed. In any case the attacks that were taking place at the time of my arrest were, obviously, acts of solidarity. For the majority of society the bank comprises a ruthless financial mechanism that will day after day squeeze thousands of families. And everybody knows that the banking giants are responsible for today’s financial crisis that the people come to pay for.

You define yourself as an anarchist. Do you believe in armed violence?

Throughout the process of social change, a number of different forms of struggle have taken shape. Each person chooses the form of action they believe to fit the political necessities of the times in which they live. I personally believe that there is no historical or objective condition now that should make us leave any particular form of struggle in the cupboard of history. To the contrary, we live in some very violent times, where states on the international level exercise terrorism against all.

A few days ago we had the armed attack against the Police Station of Ayia Paraskeui in Athens. Do you agree with attacks like this?

What matters is how these attacks are portrayed in the eyes of society, without the Goebbels-like distorting lens of the media. I am neither a critic nor an estimator of actions of armed struggle. I have never claimed – nor could I – such a title.

Some anti-authoritarians claim that in the face of the police that were shot, police violence is punished. Do you agree with this opinion?

Whether we like it or not the armed representatives of order and security, as they are called, have connected their operational existence with violence and repression: with “random” discharging of guns, with the raping of women and the assassinations of migrants in police stations, with beatings, torturing, arbitrariness, humiliation and so much that takes place either behind station walls or out in the streets. Every one of us should, taking all this into account, reach their own conclusion.

But isn't the logic of “collective punishment” the most fascist one?

Such a logic should be sought between the winners of socio-political clashes, who are the ones who turned it into a regular tactic. The fact that some people chose to return what they have been receiving for years might strike many as odd, but what can we do? You're going to reap just what you sow.

Do you believe that we are entering a phase of violence without rules? For example, up to this day, never before had a woman been attacked. What have you got to say about “blind” attacks like this?

I do not know if these are, indeed, “blind attacks”. The ones that have taken place in the last few years comprise attacks against targets that historically belong to the authoritarian system of repression and exploitation of human society. I have never seen a citizen being targeted.

What kind of feelings does the attempted assassination of a 23-year old girl evoke to you?

You would be better off to ask those who have fallen dead by police bullets.

Should 19-year old children comprise the terrorists' targets?

The police who were shot were not shot because they were young kids. They were shot for other reasons that obviously have nothing to do with their age. These will be explained to us by those who took that action.

A little while ago some youths were arrested in Chalandri, Athens, under the accusation of participating in the group “Coalition of the Cells of Fire”. What about them, are they terrorists?

The terrorists are those who daily condemn us to a slow death. To a life without living. Those who framed-up 19-year old kids with no evidence, in order to alter the dynamics of their coming electoral defeat (*he refers to the Conservative government that stepped down on October 4 – trans.*)

What is your life in prison like?

As difficult as it is for the rest of the prisoners. The problems of the greek purgatory-prisons are known to all of us and journalists in particular. You should know however that all of us in here will not allow neither for our dignity nor our right to freedom to rot away in the prison cells.

You exist around penal prisoners (as opposed to political prisoners – trans). How do they treat you?

First, I disagree with the term “penal”. I do not agree with distinctions between prisoners. The way people treat us depends on how we treat them too. Everything is an impression. At second sight, nothing is as we imagine it to be.

If you could escape, would you do it?

I will reply to you with a slogan: “The passion for freedom is stronger than any prison”.

Mr Chrysohoidis (the minister of “citizen protection”) has announced he will be withdrawing personal body guards from politicians and businessmen. Would you advice him to withdraw them or retain them?

The ones you mentioned will most definitely advise him much wiser on what he should do!