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Greece

All passion spent

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Description:

As in most European countries, the campaign in Greece for the elections on June 13 did not excite great passions, unlike the parliamentary elections of March 7, which saw PASOK (the Greek Socialist Party) clearly beaten by the right in the form of the New Democracy party (ND) of Kostas Karamanlis.

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As in most European countries, the campaign in Greece for the elections on June 13 did not excite great passions, unlike the parliamentary elections of March 7, which saw PASOK (the Greek Socialist Party) clearly beaten by the right in the form of the New Democracy party (ND) of Kostas Karamanlis.

While voting is in theory obligatory, around 36% of registered voters abstained! It should be said that the European issues had not been prioritized, except in a negative sense by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the far right. In this framework, the interest of these elections lies more in observations on eventual modifications of the political landscape after three months of right wing government. In fact, nothing decisive came out of the results, but it would be wrong to not pay attention to a certain number of contradictory signs, some months from a "post-Olympic" autumn which could see Karamanlis moving sharply to introduce a right wing programme. The repressive arsenal which he is establishing during the Games is very worrying.

The issues

Until now the Karamanlis government has avoided taking measures which are too controversial. There is no question of a head-on confrontation with the workers two months before the Olympics. Of course, conflicts exist and the former right wing leader Mitsotakis is pressing Karamanlis to take "necessary measures", but the government has so far not had too many difficulties and has benefited from the realization of some of the preceding government's measures (public works). The ND's objective for these elections was, then, simply to maintain its good score in the parliamentary elections (45.4%) and if possible increase its advantage over PASOK. [1]

It should be said that this was not difficult. Since its defeat in March (with 40.5%), PASOK, under its new leader George Papandreou, has seemed on the verge of a crisis. The question remains whether the working class and peasant base of PASOK, whose score at the March election remained very high, will question an orientation synonymous with serious social regression. In this framework, the elections in June would reveal whether the gap would grow with the ND and if a true crisis existed (bearing in mind that in the Greek context of two-party politics, the rest of the Greek left accounted for only around 12% of the vote in March).

To the left of PASOK

To the left of PASOK, the traditional sectarianism of the KKE, Synaspismos (originating from the Eurocommunist left) and the far left has begun to evolve thanks to social phenomena like the Greek Social Forum (GSF). But at the political level, things advance much too slowly, and the "electoral tradition" of the European elections has played against possible progress on this level. Indeed, it has been evident for a long time that at the European elections, a small part of the PASOK electorate votes more to the left. Thus, while in 2000 PASOK received 44% of the votes in the parliamentary elections, it scored only 32.9% at the European elections of 1999, where the KKE got 8.7% and Synaspismos 5.2 % (a third reformist party, DIKKY, a split from PASOK, obtained 6.9%). This tradition explains the sectarian reflexes of the other organizations who squabble over the votes from PASOK.

The KKE campaign was marked above all by its nationalist character. Arguing that Greece should leave the European Union, the KKE has offered no perspective for the construction of a Europe of workers. Worse, its

campaign played on fear and the irrational, associating mad cow disease and genetically modified plants with the EU. On this nationalist basis, the KKE waged an extremely aggressive campaign against Synaspismos, with the clear objective of reducing its score, which was not too different from that of the KKE in recent years (5.5% against 3.2% at the 2000 parliamentary elections, 5.9% against 3.26% for the Syriza regroupment in March 2004).

At the March 2004 parliamentary elections an electoral regroupment, Syriza had attracted the interest of a part of the radical left. At the time we noted the limits of this alliance, marked above all by the absence of an equitable relationship of forces between Synaspimos, whose goals were above all electoralist (staying above 3%, the minimum threshold to have deputies elected), and the forces of the radical left. Syriza has not survived its congenital weaknesses and its poor electoral result (compared to the hopes raised, and on the basis of the weak working class support for the list) and Synaspismos then engaged in a well-worn reversal of position. It refused to put forward a Syriza list, and in this campaign opted for a very conscious personalized rapprochement with PASOK, its leader Konstantopoulos openly consorting with several PASOK leaders. It also launched some harsh attacks on the KKE. Konstantopoulos made only weak denials of rumours that he would eventually run for president of Greece with the consensual support of the right and PASOK! Was there a list symbolising the desire for regroupment of a radical and anti-capitalist left and the activity of the Social Forum? In fact, there was one list which in part responded to these expectations, that of "Women for Another Europe", led by the excellent singer Nena Venetsanou.

This list was put together in two weeks and had its limitations, but given that and despite its social composition (of artists, liberal professions and teachers), this list was nonetheless seen as an attempt to give political expression to the social movement, as well as providing the satisfaction of thus condemning the manoeuvres of Synaspismos. In itself, then, this list sums up the difficulties, the hopes but also the limits to developing any kind of credible electoral reflection of the movement for global justice in Greece. In these conditions, and on the basis of several proposals, OKDE-Spartakos (Fourth International) called for a vote for the lists of the Anti-capitalist Alliance, a front for the SEK (Greek section of the IST, the International Socialist Tendency, of which the British SWP is the best known organization), and for MERA, a front for the NAR (a split of KKE youth in the early 1990s), two far left groups. However, curiously, the debates about an anti-capitalist left continued during this period, and this was certainly because they were isolated from electoral pressures!

The results

As might be inferred from the above, there were no great surprises. The ND gained 43.3% and 11 seats, PASOK 34% and eight seats, the KKE 9.3% and three seats, Synaspismos 4% and one seat, the same score as LAOS (far right, one seat). In fifth position was the list of Women for Another Europe with 0.75%, and then innumerable other lists. Among them were the ML-KKE (Maoist) with 0.35%, the Anti-capitalist Alliance with 0.2% and MERA with 0.22%, while on the far right the National Front got 0.25% and the Patriotic Alliance 0.17%.

If the right clearly outdistanced PASOK, Georges Papandreou's party limited the damage, improving on its European score of 1999. Thus in the absence of a rank and file movement it is unlikely that a real crisis will break out. The question is, rather, how the party leadership will position itself before the social movements which could erupt in the autumn.

The KKE can be happy enough, improving on its 1999 score and clearly outstripping Synaspismos! However, it was also hit by abstention, losing 15,000 votes and an examination of its "fiefdoms" shows that while it improved its performance in the working class periphery of Athens (from 11.91% in 1999 to 13.16%) it lost 13,000 votes. In its bastion on the island of Lesbos it fell from 18.36% to 16.41%, the lost votes apparently going to PASOK and to the right! Also, while the KKE was counting on taking votes from those who had supported DIKKY in 1999, it seems that this 6.9% share of the vote was scattered in every direction, from the right to the radical left, not to mention to those

who abstained. All this draws attention to the limits of the (relative) renaissance of the KKE.

The big loser at these elections was undoubtedly Synaspismos. While its objective was to keep its two deputies and stay close to the score of the KKE, its total fell from 5.2% in 1999 to 4% and one deputy. After the elections, Konstantopoulos said he would not continue as president of the party.

A nice surprise was the vote of the Women For Another Europe list, whose score in the Athens region and a part of Thessaloniki was more than 1%. Given the conditions under which it was launched, it should be stressed that this was the best score ever achieved in Greece by a list identified with the radical left!

However, the far right leader Karatzaferis and his LAOS ("People") movement also achieved a disconcerting score and a pole is forming on the basis of a strong nationalism in Greece, shared between left and right, not to speak of a pronounced anti-Semitism.

Some perspectives

This progress of the far right could have a very rapid reflection, as the end of work for the Olympic Games could lead to 60,000 layoffs, with many of the workers threatened because they are immigrants. In a broader context, the end of the Games could lead to a harsher set of measures across the board. Placing the anti-racist struggle at the heart of social mobilization will then be a priority for the Greek anti-capitalist left, and it will surely be necessary to go beyond anti-racist festivals (successful as they have been).

Parallel to a united front on the priority social questions, the construction of the anti-capitalist left should move to a higher speed, given the proclaimed will of the currents to advance. The debates should take the following into account:

- ▶ The instrumentalization of the social movements like the social Forum;
- ▶ the crisis of Synaspismos: can the rank and file assert themselves at the next congress so that the organization can begin to break with a politics built around the bureaucratic contacts and roles of its leaders and cadres.
- ▶ the crisis of a part of the far left. Two factors have been central here, the debate around the launch of Syriza and the debate on the vote around Cypriot reunification, where most of the far left advocated a "No" vote and OKDE-Spartakos was one of the few to defend a "Yes" vote. The nationalist sentiment whipped up by the Greek Cypriot president has led to some thought on the radical left as to the simple-mindedness of certain slogans of anti-imperialist appearance which could easily be taken up by the nationalist leadership of the Greek Orthodox Church!

Some tasks for the coming months, then, not so much Olympic in their nature as Titanic.

A hereditary bourgeois "democracy"

Democracy in Greece has become the preserve of a handful of big bourgeois families.

All passion spent

- ▶ the Karamanlis family: Konstantin, prime minister in 1974 then president; his nephew Kostas, prime minister; another nephew is a minister.
- ▶ the Mitsotakis family: Kostas, prime minister; his daughter Dora, mayor of Athens; a grandson is a deputy.
- ▶ the Papandreou family: George, the patriarch, was a centrist minister in the 1950s; Andreas, ex-Trotskyist, founder of PASOK and several times prime minister; "Georgakis", current leader of PASOK.

Not to forget the Mercuri family; Melina, the star of "Never on a Sunday" and PASOK minister of culture, was a granddaughter of a right wing mayor of Athens. The examples could be multiplied, and the same was indeed true in the nineteenth century, but our time would be better employed building a real democracy, where everyone can make their own dynamic contribution!

[1] For an analysis of those elections see ["Return of the right"](#), IV 358