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Greece

ANTARSYA and the anticapitalist project in Greece

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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This contribution was submitted to the February 2014 IC meeting by Dimitris and Manos, the IC members for Greece, on behalf of the Greek section OKDE-Spartakos.

Origins

The effort to build an anticapitalist front in Greece has a long story. In 1989, the Greek section of the FI, OKDE-Spartakos, along with a few other far left groups, created the short-lived Alternative Left Coalition (EAS), which was the first attempt to regroup the anticapitalist and revolutionary left. In the 1990's MERA (Front of the Radical Left) was formed around a left split of the Communist Party (NAR). NAR left the CP after its participation in two class collaboration governments in 1989, along with the right New Democracy and, later, PASOK. Apart from NAR, the Trotskyist ICRFI section (EEK), a maoist group (EKKE) and a radical ecologists' group took part in MERA. Despite bringing together some good militants, the front has never had really important social implementation.

In 2001 a new process to unite the anticapitalist and revolutionary left in Greece was put forward. OKDE-Spartakos attended the process, which finally failed because soon most of the organizations involved fell back on a different project gravitated by the reformist eurocommunist party of Synaspismos, where SYRIZA came from in 2004.

However, the discussion went on. After the big university students' movement in 2006-2007 and the teachers' strike in autumn 2006, given the key-role played by far-left activists and the relatively passive role of SYRIZA and the CP, it was obvious that a new space was created for a front to the left of reformism. OKDE-Spartakos was actively involved in the new process, which has been not easy. In the elections of 2007 we ended up with two different anti-capitalist fronts, the older MERA and the United Anticapitalist Left (ENANTIA), which included OKDE-Spartakos, the IST section (SEK) and two radical left ex-eurocommunist/maoist groups (ARAN and ARAS). Both fronts scored a little more than 0.1% in the national election.

The December 2008 riot revealed the need for a coherent political subject to the left of reformism. The Communist Party denounced the movement and stayed aside; SYRIZA offered its typical support, but played a marginal role in the actual course of the facts; the anarchist groups were neither able nor willing to offer a political perspective for the riot, despite their important role in the demonstrations and clashes; the far left played a remarkable role in the demonstrations and the assemblies organized in the occupied universities and in various districts and also tried to politicize the mass movement; however it lacked a central reference point.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that just after the December riot, during the first months, ANTARSYA (Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow) was created, with the participation of most of the groups previously belonging to MERA and ENANTIA. The new project was launched through several local anticapitalist assemblies and a big national meeting in a full basketball stadium. In the struggles against the austerity measures to come, ANTARSYA would play a remarkable and sometimes even leading role.

The political character of ANTARSYA

ANTARSYA constitutes a front of organizations and individual militants whose common reference is political unity

regarding basic issues of the conjuncture. Its militants share a central corpus of basic transitional demands and a commitment against any attempt to manage the bourgeois institutions. ANTARSYA asks for the total cancellation of the debt and the nationalization of banks and the key sectors of the economy, without any compensation and under workers' control. It is against the euro and the EU, who are two major pillars of the bourgeois blackmail to accept the austerity measures. It is in favor of organizing workers and the people in massive structures of self-organization. It calls for a united front in action. It demands the legalization of all immigrants etc.

However, there is not a full programmatic agreement among all ANTARSYA militants, that's why we maintain our own independent organization within the front. The front is hegemonized by revolutionary ideas in several key issues, but it is not a revolutionary front. The old questions of the minimum and the maximum program, of reform or revolution, of the stageist theory are coming across directly or indirectly. That's why a continuous important programmatic debate is held inside it, even if for some people that watch it from the outside this may seem to be sectarianism.

Membership and sectors of intervention

3000 members all around Greece voted for the second Congress of ANTARSYA in June 2013, despite the pressure by SYRIZA after its electoral takeoff in 2012. Most of them are youth. The reason why ANTARSYA has resisted the pressure of SYRIZA is that most of its members were not just recruited to an abstract anticapitalist plan, on the contrary, they have been working together in radical far-left platforms in workplaces, universities and urban movements for many years. The most important feature of ANTARSYA is its solid decision to try to incorporate its membership in the natural vanguard of the working class.

In the universities, EAAK, a radical platform led by ANTARSYA, has led all the important struggles since 1991. It scores a national average around 12,5% in the election for the students' unions, which is more than double compared to SYRIZA's results and slightly less than the CP's percentage.

In some workplaces, especially in the public sector, where workers are by far more unionized, ANTARSYA has gained significant growth through the anti-capitalist platform "Interventions" (Paremvasis). For the first time the revolutionary left is represented in the Executive Committee of the National Confederation of Public Sector Workers (ADEDY), with 2 ANTARSYA members out of the 17 (2 of the CP, 3 of SYRIZA, 4 of PASOK, 4 of ND and 2 independent social-democrats). One of them is also a member of OKDE-Spartakos. "Interventions" won 20% of the vote for the last Congress of the National Federation of Teachers, one of the biggest unions nationally. ANTARSYA also has 2 representatives in the Center of Athens Labor Unions of the private sector, as well as in several other union federations (High School Teachers, Hospital Doctors, Local Government Workers, Journalists, Engineers, Technicians etc).

ANTARSYA has an intervention in several local movements, as well. It has around 20 militants elected in regional or city councils.

In the antifascist and anti-racist movement ANTARSYA's intervention is not always homogeneous and coordinated. There are some parts that tend to underestimate these tasks in practice, though not in word. However, in some crucial occasions ANTARSYA has been the only visible force of the left to support massive antifascist struggles. The most important example has been the 30,000 people demonstration against the neo-nazi Golden Dawn national headquarters in Athens in September 22, a demonstration that was officially boycotted by both the CP and SYRIZA, including its left platform (with the exception of Kokkino and militants of the Network for Political and Rights, who belong to the majority of SYRIZA). On the other hand, ANTARSYA has a close relation to some immigrant

communities (Pakistan, Afghan, Syria), this is why it was the 3rd party among immigrants who vote in Athens.

There is a women committee and, since some weeks, an lgbt group in ANTARSYA, both built with the significant contribution of our organization.

The intervention of ANTARSYA among high school students is unfortunately low.

The best score of ANTARSYA in a national election has been 1.2%, in May 2012. In June 2012 it fell down to 0.36%, due to the pressure of SYRIZA. In the last regional elections ANTARSYA won a national average about 2%. For the time being, electoral scores are much behind ANTARSYA's social implementation and political radius, even if the latter should also further improve.

ANTARSYA works on the basis of local committees were individual members of the front register. There are more than 20 local committees in Athens, 8 in Thessaloniki, 2 in Patras and one in each other significant city and town of the country. Its leading bodies are the National Coordination Body (101 members) and the Central Coordination Committee (23 members), both elected by the National Congress. Important decisions are taken with a majority of 2/3. There is a double membership status for militants that also belong to one of the consisting organizations. Around 20% of the members of ANTARSYA belong to no consisting organization.

Problems and weaknesses

ANTARSYA is still a project in progress. Despite the significant intervention of its militants in the workers' and social struggles and the vigorous life of its unionist platforms, ANTARSYA itself functions mostly as an electoral coalition. Regarding its internal democracy there are various things that need to mature, like the proportional representation of opposing platforms (although there is already some providence so that all organizations are represented in the leading bodies). Simultaneously, there are still important strategic dilemmas and differences inside ANTARSYA. The different traditions where the various currents originate from make it difficult to achieve a higher level of agreement and coherence.

The major dispute within ANTARSYA regards the type of front we need: a distinct anti-capitalist front or a broader front along with other radical currents. In the final analysis, the second proposal corresponds to a popular front strategy.

This dilemma is particularly reflected in the dispute about a possible alliance with the "plan B" organization, which is actually a platform led by the former leader of SYRIZA, Alekos Alavanos. The "plan B" supports a program similar to the one of the left platform inside SYRIZA. They demand cancellation of the debt, nationalization of banks, rupture with the eurozone. This brings them to the left of SYRIZA, who is incapable of breaking with the dominant strategy of the national bourgeoisie, i.e. the eurozone. However, their program is still radical reformist, in the sense that it is oriented towards a left government that would break with imperialism in order to establish a national progressive democratic regime and handle the capitalist crisis by means of a national monetary policy.

Our organization, as well as the IST section (SEK), strongly oppose an alliance with "plan B". We insist on the need for political independence of the anticapitalist left, which also entails being organizationally distinct from reformists, and not dissolve in a broader left political front, which is something different from the necessary united front of all militant forces, workers' organizations and parties of the left in action. We stand for the political independence of the anticapitalist and revolutionary left from the capital, the state and its institutions, we insist on the "anticapitalist

overthrow". We fight to explain that the current crisis is not just "national", and that what is at stake is not the position of certain countries in the international division of labor, but that this is about a structural and systemic crisis of capitalism, where the only way out for the working people is a rupture with the capitalist system itself.

ARAN and ARAS constitute the right wing of ANTARSYA, having strategically invested in an alliance with "plan B". They are also the forces who favor more local collaborations with SYRIZA in some cases. NAR is in the center, being ambivalent towards a possible alliance with the platform of Alavanos. The three sectors (left/right/center) are more or less of the same size, 1/3 each. For the time being the collaboration with "plan B" does not seem to succeed, the most probable is that ANTARSYA candidates autonomously in the European and the local elections, that will both take place at the same time in May.

Despite all problems, the real strength (and difference) of ANTARSYA in comparison with the rest of the left forces is based on the fact that its organizations and individual militants remain first of all accountable to the massive extra-parliamentary struggle, and not to parliamentary or other institutional engagements.

Why independent from reformist?

OKDE-Spartakos has participated in ANTARSYA since its beginning because:

â€¢ ANTARSYA is an irreplaceable political conquest of the anticapitalist and revolutionary left in Greece. Every single organization, smaller or larger, is by far less recognizable than ANTARSYA as a whole.

â€¢ ANTARSYA brings together a significant number of some thousands militants, who are basically in the vanguard of their workplaces or their field of intervention.

â€¢ It is the only force of the left that is capable of addressing both the massive radicalization that today makes its first "political stop" in the reformist proposal of SYRIZA and those militants of the CP that are deeply worried about the choices of its leadership.

â€¢ It is the only political force with a nation-wide range who has elaborated and formulated the core of a transitional program, linking the existing struggles in the present conditions with the perspective of a rupture with capitalism.

OKDE-Spartakos in the present conditions fights for the creation of a revolutionary subject, which we never thought that will be an automatic result of a linear growth of our own organization. It will be a result of the necessary programmatic elaboration and unification of different revolutionary currents and militants of the labor movement, who oppose the bourgeois attacks, struggle for the generalization of the autonomous action of workers and the oppressed and consider building forms of workers' self-organization, assemblies or committees in every workplace and neighborhood and coordination structures an indispensable task. Currents and militants that challenge the control of capitalists and of their state over production and put forward the perspective of a general political strike, of workers' control and autogestion. The creation of a revolutionary party in Greece depends on the evolutions in and around ANARSYA. And those evolutions depend, among other factors, on the distinct existence and growth of the FI section.

The choice to be politically independent from reformism is far from obvious in Greece. Many organizations and groups, of trotskyst or other far left origin, continue to be part of SYRIZA, thus take the choice to try to influence reformism from inside. Since there is a lot of international interest in this issue, it is crucial to understand the real political character of SYRIZA, regardless its mythical misinterpretations. In the following appendix we tried to gather

only a few telling facts that prove that the choice to fight within SYRIZA is ineffective and deprived of any real perspective.

Appendix: the bankruptcy of the reformist plan of SYRIZA and the dead-ends of the revolutionaries within it

SYRIZA does not question the fundamental bourgeois policies and choices (Debt, EU, Private Economy)

Giorgos Stathakis, prominent MP and person in charge of the Development Sector of SYRIZA, has declared that the odious debt, which is to be immediately canceled, is only 5% of the total. This means that a future SYRIZA government is planning to erase only a little part of the debt which is constantly increasing both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the GDP (about 120% back in 2010, before the first Memorandum, rising to 175% in the end of 2013). It therefore shows that SYRIZA accepts the basis on which austerity policies have been justified the last 4 years.

According to Giannis Milios, person in charge of the Economy Sector, SYRIZA acknowledges that the main goal of the Memoranda was to achieve balanced budgets, and shares this goal. This means they accept that austerity is inevitable during the capitalist crisis, and therefore they accept the obligation of the working people to pay for the crisis.

SYRIZA has refused to participate in the demonstration against the Greek presidency of the EU, that took place on January 8th. There has been a call by ANTARSYA which was turned down. SYRIZA has neither taken any initiative against the police banning the demonstration, and its opposition was restrained to President Tsipras abstaining from the ceremony.

The European campaign of Tsipras, who runs a candidacy for the European Commission, is telling. This has two legs: on the one hand, it demonstrates the acceptance of the most non-democratic features of the function of the EU (the European Commission is an institution deprived of even the typical legitimization that has the European Parliament, it is only a bureaucratic position, away from any social control). On the other hand, the campaign abroad is run on the basis of the demand to renegotiate the Memorandum, in contrast with SYRIZA's official position about canceling it. This is a clear example of the ambiguity of reformist rhetoric.

Tsipras and Stathakis have participated in a meeting organized by the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (???), along with prominent members of PASOK and ND, where they have spoken for the need of a healthy private sector which would attract both greek and foreign investments. This was not something unprecedented. The chairman of ??? has repeatedly declared his interest in SYRIZA's program. A well-known example is telling: SYRIZA's official announcement about the issue of medicines stated that the party defends the interests of greek medicine industries, offering to the right-wing government the opportunity to accuse them of corruption and dependence on business interests! Therefore, the need for the "productive reconstruction" that SYRIZA holds in its banners is based on a so-called healthy private initiative.

SYRIZA forms coalitions with political persons that supported the governments of the Memoranda and austerity

It has recently formed a "forum" with various such personalities, as is Louka Katseli (minister of Labor in the

Papandreou government, which brought in the IMF and the Troika).

It runs Voudouris as its official candidate in the Peloponnese region. Voudouris was elected MP of PASOK in 2009 as a close collaborator of Papandreou. He voted for the first Memorandum and later joined DIMAR, as a member of which he supported the government of Samaras, formed after the elections of June 2012. He was also a member of the management board of the Foundation of Anastasios Pallis, a nazi-friendly shipowner and arms dealer.

Among other former PASOK MPs that voted for the memorandum, SYRIZA has incorporated Michelogiannakis, who after its transfer to SYRIZA stated in the parliament that the memorandum will lead young boys to homosexuality and won't let young girls marry! This didn't have any consequences for him by the party.

SYRIZA is defenceless against populist or far right voices that eagerly incorporates in its ranks

Tsipras and the leading group around him have proposed Karypidis to be the official candidate in the West Macedonia region. He is one of the richest businessmen in North Greece and a TV channel owner, where he has hosted leading members of the Golden Dawn. He himself has often expressed antisemit and openly racist ideas. His candidacy was withdrawn after triggering a scandal on social media. He is since officially supported by LAOS, the far right party of Giorgos Karatzaferis, similar to the Front National of Le Pen.

In the South Aegean region, SYRIZA runs Spyrou as its official candidate. Spyrou is a corrupted local cadre, who has been the mayor of Lipsi island for 28 years. He expressed ultra-patriot opinions about the Aegean being a vital space for greeks throughout the ages, about its inhabitants having a special DNA, and about the need for resistance against the efforts to sell out the whole country and the islands to Turkey. Spyrou is a joint candidacy along with the populist right winged party of Independent Greeks.

SYRIZA has included in its Commission of Defence Kostas Grivas, who is famous for writing for far right and nazi papers. His opinions can be resumed in the following: "Immigration erodes Greece's national character and turns it into a new Rwanda", "Albanians are the most dangerous nation", "The state of Skopje must be absorbed by the neighboring countries", "Bulgaria is an eventual dangerous enemy". Grivas has expressed himself in favor of the anti-immigrant fence in Evros River on the basis of defending the collective rights (national rights) against a "distorted understanding of human individual rights". Grivas has participated in the recent meeting of the Sector of Defense of SYRIZA, where its fundamental positions on this topic were presented.

Absolute lack of inner democracy-Absolute power of the president and the leading group

It is a world-wide originality for a left party the fact that the president is directly elected from the Congress and thus gathers considerably reinforced powers.

A recent example thereof is the candidacies for the regional elections. The choice of the candidates has been made without taking into account the opinion of local committees, but after an overall proposal of the President which was accepted by a single vote in the Central Committee. The inclusion of pro-Memoranda personalities is violating the statutes, which deny such collaborations. The majority of the local committees in the Peloponnese has openly disagreed with the candidacy of Voudouris, however the leadership has reaffirmed it, supporting neither at random nor by accident that this choice incarnates the strategy of SYRIZA on expansion and coalitions.

The fact that the inner left opposition didn't openly doubt the legitimacy of the leadership to take decisions that cancel the ones of the congress and that it didn't ask for what is officially provided (resignation of the CC, new congress) is

telling of its incorporation and alignment with the leadership. It is clear that the inner opposition is restrained to an ineffective struggle inside the leadership and it does not see the violation of the party democracy as a matter of principles. It is also telling that its leading members are committed to support all candidates, despite their disagreement expressed in the leading bodies.

The decision made at the first congress of SYRIZA to turn it into a single party, the banning of all inner factions and the ultimatum to the various organizations that continue to function as such to dissolve, or else they would suffer the provided consequences, is one more example of the anti-democratic function of SYRIZA.

SYRIZA bows to the governmental campaign of intimidation and to the conservative petty bourgeois reflexes

A SYRIZA MP has been accused by the church of insulting the popular religious sentiment, because he was dressed as a priest in a local carnival parade. The church has also asked his expulsion from the party. The position of the person in charge of religious issues of SYRIZA was unfortunately identical to that of the church, and this is a fact proving that SYRIZA is stepping back on the issue of religious freedom, as it matches the religious sentiment with the dominant orthodox doctrine, as well as on the issue of the separation between state and church, as it recognizes the right of the church to intervene in the interior of political parties.

SYRIZA boycotted the big antifascist demonstration against the nazi national headquarters which followed the murder of the antifascist singer Pavlos Fyssas in September, because of the fear of possible clashes. Even more, SYRIZA denounced the demonstration as "provocation". This obviously echoed the pressure of the government's rhetoric about the "two extremes". Tsipras announced that SYRIZA will guarantee the "stability of the country", thus fully aligning with "constitutional legality". The left platform did not question the boycott and followed the same line.

SYRIZA is both unable and unwilling to inspire any class movement against the government and its policies

SYRIZA unionists are accountable for the cancellation of the 2nd grade teachers' strike in May 2013. The strike was voted for by a vast majority in local union assemblies all around Greece. Unfortunately, the meeting of the presidents of local unions has canceled this decision, and the unionists of SYRIZA have played a treacherous role, finally voting against the strike. Another strike was launched finally in September, but just after the first week the unionists of SYRIZA voted against it again, supporting that the conditions were not mature enough. As a result of the governmental policies in the education, thousands of high school teachers were thrown out of their jobs.

At this very time, the minister of health is planning a reform in the Primary Healthcare System, through shutting numerous medical units. The workers in this sector have answered with a strike that goes on for 3 months, while they have occupied some units since last Monday. The unionists of SYRIZA see these occupations exclusively as an opportunity to present their candidates and to run their electoral campaign, in fact not proposing any means of escalation. They present the vote for SYRIZA in the coming elections as the only solution. SYRIZA hasn't at any case been able to mobilize its members in support of the occupations, a task mainly undertaken by ANTARSYA.

Conclusion

In its 10-year long existence, SYRIZA has proved to be a reformist political party which is not only impossible to shift to the left and serve as a tool to build an anti-capitalist subject, but, on the contrary, in a period of such a historical capitalist crisis, it rapidly turns to the right, contesting the government in terms of a social-democrat management of the bourgeois institutions, on a national and an international level. Of course the right wing of Synaspismos party has left SYRIZA in 2010 to form DIMAR, but SYRIZA makes up by recruiting former prominent members of PASOK on an everyday basis. Those cadres are the personification of SYRIZA's route to social-democratization.

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Moreover, our estimation that the participation of anti-capitalist organizations therein would soon lead to their incorporation seems to be constantly proved. Kokkino has suffered two splits and a big part of it was incorporated in the presidential majority. KOE, a former maoist organization, split in two and those remaining in SYRIZA have turned into loyal supporters of the Tsipras' leading group. The Left Platform, in which DEA and Kokkino participate, is politically hegemonized by the reformist bureaucrat Panagiotis Lafazanis, while it proved to be totally unable to cause any considerable problem to the leadership on the occasion of the candidacies of Voudouris and Spyrou, as described above. The inability of anti-capitalists to halt the shift of SYRIZA to the right and the incorporation or even the dissolution of most organizations into it prove the stalemate and the bankruptcy of the effort to influence and pressure reformism from inside.

The project of ANTARSYA, despite its problems, remains the only plan (an existing and not abstract plan) in Greece that promotes the penetration and consolidation of revolutionary anti-capitalist politics in the working class and popular strata, along with a united front tactic in action. In periods of crisis, this task is indeed more legitimate and timely than ever.