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Greek elections

A contribution to the debate on Greece

- Debate - Perspectives in Greece -

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As part of the ongoing discussion we publish together two articles by Andreas Kloke, a member of the central leadership of OKDE-Spartacos, Greek section of the Fourth International. The first was written on June 11th "What is our discussion Greece about?" and the other, shorter one is an assessment of the election results after June 17 "New memorandum government for Greece", written on June 21st.

Tariq Ali, a well respected left intellectual and writer and a revolutionary leftist in his youth, has stated that ANTARSYA is "influenced by the CPG's (KKE'S) sectarianism" and "refused the proposal to collaborate with SYRIZA." We didn't know that Tariq Ali is so "well informed" about the situation of the Greek left, but his comments obviously make it quite urgent that we, members of ANTARSYA, ask ourselves what is going on in this discussion about the election results in Greece and the prospects of the Greek left as a whole. This task becomes even more important in light of other messages we have received from abroad, among them from the British section of the Fourth International (FI), Socialist Resistance (SR), and even from the FI leadership, that call on us, OKDE, the Greek section of the FI, to support the "5 points" that SYRIZA's leadership has suggested to DIMAR, the very right wing "left" party and split from SYRIZA, and indirectly even to PASOK and to the right-nationalist "Independent Greeks," as a programmatic platform for a coalition government after June 17.

If we are to take these "5 points" seriously it should be clear that we are dealing with a very right-wing version of a left-bourgeois government, something that was quite commonplace for decades after WWI and WWII, when social democratic and Stalinist parties participated in "left governments" in Europe and on other continents. In all cases such "left" governments - sometimes rhetorically confused with "workers' governments," a formula which is used again by some in our present discussion - have led to disastrous results for the working class, the oppressed and exploited, as well as for the workers' movement. These are the experiences starting from the social democratic government in Germany after the revolution of November 1918, continuing with the popular front governments in France and Spain in the 1930s, the Indonesian coup of 1965, the popular front government in Chile, the Mitterand government in France with the participation of the PCF (1981-84), prime minister Jospin (1997-2002), along with the various social democratic-led governments in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Britain and other countries. Nobody should forget so easily the lessons of the workers' movement over almost 100 years.

The meaning of SYRIZA's success

This is the first crucial point of this discussion: Is SYRIZA a "left centrist," by which we mean an "almost revolutionary" formation, as some commentators suggest these days - for example due to the participation of organizations with (Mao-)Stalinist or Trotskyist origins? Or is it simply a left reformist party like the other parties of the "European Left" - Melenchon's "Left Front" or the German party, "Die Linke," for example? After all the propaganda we hear from abroad, from comrades and organizations with a euro-communist, Maoist or (half-) Trotskyist background (among others) about SYRIZA's "steadfastness" against the memoranda policies and other things, we are required to simply state that SYRIZA is nothing qualitatively different from all of the other parties of the "European Left." This means that it is left-reformist. It is not a political formation that intends to push developments in the direction of a socialist transformation of society, nor will its coming to power move things "objectively" in this direction.

Quite the opposite is true, in fact. SYRIZA will try everything it can to keep workers' and popular anger within the limits of capitalist society and of the bourgeois state. The few organizations of Trotskyist or Maoist origins inside

SYRIZA do not have significant weight and are forced to adapt to every decision taken by the SYRIZA leadership, which is in fact the leadership of the SYN party. This is a very heavy burden—Euros"probably too heavy—Euros"for organizations that claim to be revolutionary. It's true that the SYN party, particularly its youth association, as well as the other organizations of SYRIZA, are involved in all of the actions of the resistance movement, more or less, since 2004. But the leadership keeps the forces back; there are always reservations. So it was no surprise that SYRIZA's principal demand during the hot phase of the October strike, for example, was "for new elections," a demand it shared with the other big reformist party, the CPG (KKE). This is very characteristic of the attitude and the mentality of both reformist parties.

From a social or political view, the sudden rise of SYRIZA's votes in the May elections, which will be followed by an even bigger success on June 17, is an instinctive (a left but also conservative) reflex to "improve" the system and to keep the anger and the protests within the limits of the existing (capitalist) order. There is a desire by broad layers to stop - perhaps even reverse - the memoranda policies, but at the same time to maintain the euro. This means not coming into a too-sharp conflict with the present regime in the EU. Let us explain carefully to avoid misunderstandings: Obviously, neither the Greek bourgeoisie nor the Troika are in favour of a SYRIZA government, do not want even a SYRIZA-led coalition government. The system of bourgeois rule has reached an impasse, whatever government might emerge after June 17. Yes, a SYRIZA or even a SYRIZA-led government will be better for the big struggles which will come after the elections - life and death battles, to be sure. Yes, all political forces of the left, including KKE and ANTARSYA, should support every measure of a SYRIZA-led government that will be directed against the memoranda policies and the loan treaties. ANTARSYA should try to push SYRIZA as a whole to the left.

The necessity of the United Front

A key element of such an approach is the concept of the UNITED FRONT, another question of life and death for the Greek workers' and other movements in this terrible situation. Actually, the UNITED FRONT is a question of survival for the entire society. It means the cooperation of all parties, organizations, alliances, trade unions, formations like the "Popular Assemblies" and so many other initiatives—Euros"self-organized groups that developed during the last two years, in particular after the square occupations (Syntagma) in June of last year, one of the most heroic phases of the resistance movement so far. UNITED FRONT means united and decisive action against the common enemy wherever it is necessary: against all forms of the memoranda policies, against the wave of racism and the extremely dangerous rise of the Nazi gang "Golden Dawn" (still completely underestimated by both the KKE and the SYRIZA leadership). It means united struggles against the terror of dismissals, unemployment, of the unbearable poll taxes, for feeding the poorest and taking care of the homeless, for the defence of the health and education system, for the protection of the environment through a plan of public investments. There is no doubt that these struggles should be organized from below, by the rank and file of the movements and should be supported by the parties and organizations of the left along with everyone else.

Yes, the systematic and constant denial of such an absolutely essential UNITED FRONT by the KKE leadership is CRIMINAL. There is no other characterization for their attitude. ANTARSYA has always (or at least usually) supported the UNITED FRONT concept both in declarations and in practice. But at the same time it is indispensable not to confuse the UNITED FRONT concept, which means "march separately but strike together," with the question of participation in a left-bourgeois government, even when that government is led by a left-reformist party like SYRIZA. The government question in this case is certainly a question of power, but only in a very limited sense, because even with a SYRIZA or a SYRIZA-led government the real power will remain in the hands of the capitalist class, the Troika, and of the bourgeois state with its apparatus of repression fully intact. It is simply an illusion to believe that there will be any form of a "workers' government" or workers' power without a decisive clash with these real power structures of capitalist society. How is it possible to "forget" this simple but crucial truth? It will be impossible to get rid of this real power structure without the UNITED FRONT formations of the self-organized

exploited and oppressed, without the appearance of dual power from below - centralized on a national level.

What can we say about the attitude of the SYRIZA leadership from this viewpoint, which in the final analysis is decisive for us? Unfortunately, during the last two months electoral politics have swept over public life. Streets now are quiet. SYRIZA has withdrawn from the streets, in order to persuade the ruling class that it is not a threat to social peace and stability. ANTARSYA and some groups of anarchists with their fights against the Nazis in the streets try to keep alive the spirit of resistance. The current electoral public debate in Greece does not mirror the actual balance of power between the contending social classes. It deforms and renegotiates this balance. SYRIZA, for example, by responding awkwardly and shyly in the affirmative to the urgent calls for a "national unity government," has already moved a considerable distance to the right. It quickly becomes a substitute for the "mutated" social democracy of PASOK. During the last electoral campaign several ex-leading members of PASOK joined SYRIZA.

Can there be any doubt that SYRIZA is such a reformist party and that it is moving in a social democratic direction? Ask people in Greece themselves. Nobody will doubt it. In fact, SYRIZA's propaganda for a "left government" in combination with "staying in the euro-zone" - which means finding some "good compromise" with Greek big capital and the Troika - was the secret of SYRIZA's election success on May 6. Many people obviously hope that such a "left government" can achieve the "squaring of the circle," satisfying both the needs of the ruling classes and of the exploited and oppressed. The problem is that this will not be possible. We call such hopes "parliamentary illusions." The SYRIZA leadership itself does not hide its very moderate approach. To avoid misunderstandings it must be added that SYRIZA's success nevertheless reflects the radicalization on a mass scale, even if in a way that is limited for now - something that is not untypical at the beginning of revolutionary processes. But it seems clear that this phase, the awakening of class conscience and of a (limited) anticapitalist stance, is unavoidable.

For a third pole of the Greek left

At the same time one should bear in mind that the development of anticapitalist and, finally, revolutionary class conscience on a mass scale will not be the "automatic" result of events but is linked to the rise of mass struggles and to the political, programmatic and ideological confrontations that will necessarily be expressed in the arguments of different and opposite political parties and formations of the left. From this point of view it will be crucial to develop the nucleus of the anticapitalist/revolutionary left, i.e. mainly ANTARSYA, to transform itself into the "third pole" of the Greek left. It is one of the main tasks of the revolutionary Marxist forces today in Greece to participate in this process, precisely because both the KKE and SYRIZA leaderships are deeply reformist, by which we mean that they are closely linked to the social and political system of bourgeois class rule and therefore unavoidably obstacles to any revolutionary process that will appear. This (again unavoidable) struggle for hegemony within the left, between reformism and an anticapitalist/revolutionary orientation, will be decisive if our goal is for the workers and the oppressed to conquer the class hegemony in society (in a Gramscian sense). This means to develop dual power and to establish a workers' government based on the self-organization of the mass movement during the course of a revolutionary crisis.

So it is also necessary that the workers and oppressed organize themselves around real transitional demands and for an alternative democratic system, for a "true democracy," as the square occupation movement demanded last June, a democracy that must replace the rotten and corrupt system of bourgeois democracy which clearly reveals itself to be the dictatorship of the creditors, of big capital, and of the Troika. Last year we witnessed original transitional demands being adopted by broad popular layers when hundreds of thousands supported the slogan "We don't owe, we don't pay, we don't sell!" at Syntagma Square and everywhere in Greece. This meant that the demand for debt cancellation, raised only by ANTARSYA in 2010, was suddenly accepted also by KKE and, even if only partially (as we can see now), by SYRIZA, with its call for a "moratorium" and "renegotiations" with the Troika. The demand for "true democracy" undoubtedly expressed, even if in a not completely developed or totally clear way, the need to replace the bourgeois "democratic" dictatorship by the democracy of the self-organized workers and people. This will be achievable only through the overthrow of capitalist class rule. That is the road to a true workers

government, to revolution and to socialism.

All this does not mean that we are indifferent towards the election results on June 17. Yes, we want to see the defeat of the right parties, the fascists and PASOK also in the parliamentary elections. But as a matter of facts there will be no "majority for the left" on June 17. The left parties, alliances and organizations (including even the dubious cases of DIMAR and the Ecological Greens) gained around 37% on May 6 whereas the hardcore right and neoliberal parties and alliances had more than 46% and PASOK, a contemptibly new-right party, more than 13%. On June 17 there will be another shift to the left but it will not be enough for a "left majority." So all the talk of some leftist organizations, mainly abroad, about a "workers' government" is without real substance.

Tactical or strategic question?

In any event, a left victory in the elections is not an end in itself but should be one step to promote class consciousness and the fighting spirit of the workers and oppressed, their understanding that the struggle for basic transitional demands—like the unconditional cancellation of the debt and the nationalization of the banks and big capital under workers' control—cannot be achieved within the framework of the imperialist project called "The European Union." It is obvious, however, that raising consciousness in this way plays no role in the approach of the SYRIZA leadership. Therefore one could say that the autonomous building of an alternative anticapitalist/revolutionary pole, mainly ANTARSYA, has priority over something that many consider to be the "correct tactical behavior" towards SYRIZA and its supporters. A tactic that would emphasize the necessity of supporting SYRIZA "critically" in the elections on June 17 would have to be based on the idea that this is the key element which will allow us, under the banner of "unity," to win broader layers, including SYRIZA voters, to a more radical attack on the fundamentals of capitalist class rule in Greece.

Even if such a tactical approach is not advocated by OKDE and ANTARSYA, everybody must admit that posing the question in this way is legitimate and reasonable. Minorities in OKDE and other organizations that participate in ANTARSYA believe that this is the correct tactic under the present circumstances, characterized by an overwhelming wave of workers' and popular support for SYRIZA. It appears logical that everybody involved in the anticapitalist left has to weigh the necessity of strengthening our own pole against a correct and suitable tactic towards SYRIZA, the KKE, and their supporters. This should include support for every measure that a SYRIZA government might take against the memoranda policies and in any possible conflicts with big capital and the Troika.

It is true what comrade J.-Ph. Dives writes in a recent article referring to a remark in the "Transitional Program" (1938) where Trotsky states: "Is the creation of such a government [a real workers' government] by the traditional workers' organizations [social democratic and Stalinist] possible? Past experience shows, as has already been stated, that this is, to say the least, highly improbable. However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie." One should add, of course, that since these words were written in 1938 no "left government" elected through parliamentary means has ever travelled such a road. Nevertheless, Dives leaves open the possibility that a SYRIZA government will turn left and come into open conflict with capital and the Troika. But even in this "highly improbable" case it will be a huge advantage if the anticapitalist/revolutionary pole of the Greek left develops and pushes such a government to the left.

And we also have to note that the idea of "critical support" in order to build an alternative anticapitalist/revolutionary pole is not the attitude suggested by the SR and FI leaderships, whose statements have called simply for an uncritical adaptation to the "5 point-program" offered to us by the SYRIZA leadership as the basis for a coalition government. Such a call for uncritical support of SYRIZA has nothing to do anymore with a discussion about "correct tactics" for revolutionary Marxists towards reformist parties, since the gulf that exists between a revolutionary

orientation and a reformist one does not seem to exist for the SR and FI leaderships. They tend to replace the concept of building revolutionary Marxist organizations and parties, as sections of the Fourth International, with the concept of building "broad left parties." For the programmatic, political and ideological standards of the FI this is indeed something new that should be rejected by the international and by all of its sections.

June 11, 2012

New Memorandum-Government in Greece

The elections to the Greek Parliament of June 17 were needed because after the elections of May 6 no parties were able to form a coalition government. The result, not unexpectedly, was a "victory" for the rightwing New Democracy (ND) with 29.7% (compared to 18.9% from May 6). The left alliance SYRIZA rose from 16.8% (May 6) to 26.9%, but was again only the second strongest party. Thus, the 50 "extra" seats in parliament, decisive for the formation of a government, were captured by the now leading memoranda-party ND. ND is forced, however, to form a coalition government with the badly shrunk and discredited ex-social democratic PASOK, the third strongest party with 12.3% (a decrease of 0.9%). DIMAR, the right wing split from the SYN-party (the leading force in SYRIZA), will also be involved in the new government. DIMAR polled 6.3% (+0.2%) and is thus the sixth strongest party. For the first time DIMAR openly takes over responsibility for the memoranda policies. The "Independent Greeks," a spin-off of ND, who refuse to support the memoranda policies, achieved a fourth place finish once again, with 7.5% (-3.1).

The neo-Nazi gang of Chrysi Avgi ("Golden Dawn" - GM) is now in fifth place with 6.9% (-0.1). The stabilization of the neo-Nazis is even more remarkable since their terrorist character was openly revealed in the weeks after the May 6 vote, with open attacks on immigrants and leftist politicians using knives and clubs - in full public view. Nobody can say any longer that the voters do not know what they were voting for. The permanent installation of the Nazis in the Greek Parliament - but with almost daily terrorist attacks on the streets of Athens and elsewhere - as well as in social life is the most striking result of the elections. The CPG (KKE) received just 4.5% and lost 4% compared to May. All parties below the 3% - threshold on May 6 had high losses and became almost insignificant for the outcome of these elections, including LAOS with 1.6% (-1.3), "Dimourgia Xana" with 1.6% (-0.6), the "Green Ecologists" with 0.9% (-2.0) and ANTARSYA with 0.33% (-0.9). The valid votes cast represented 61.5% of the electorate (-1.2), again significantly lower than ever before.

A closer look at the election result shows that the shift between "right" and "left" compared to May 6 is not very big. The right-wing parties (from ND to GM) together polled 47.3%. The percentage of PASOK as a "new" right-wing party should be added to this. The left received altogether 39% taking into account also DIMAR and the Greens. The memoranda-parties, so far ND and PASOK, but now DIMAR too, scored together 48.3%, and of course have a clear majority in Parliament. In accordance with the rules of bourgeois parliamentarism this might be interpreted as providing a "democratic mandate" for the continuation of the memoranda policies. Nevertheless, this "mandate" is, even in a formal sense, quite weak.

ND's "success" must be partially attributed to the unprecedented propaganda campaign of the memoranda parties and the mass media in Greece and other European countries, according to which an electoral victory of the left would have meant Greece's immediate exit from the euro, the absolute economic ruin of the country, the termination of all payments etc. In addition, ND was able to attract most of the traditional right electorate that was very fragmented on May 6. Nonetheless, the election results of ND are generally weak, reflecting a historic downward trend that will continue now with ND's role as the leading government party. On the left, the SYRIZA party or alliance could establish itself as the clear leading force primarily because had it come in first this would have held out the prospect of a "left government".

Situation and prospects of the Left

As for the left-wing parties or alliances and their prospects, it should be noted that the slogan "Elections now!" issued by the two leading reformist parties, i.e. KKE and SYRIZA, especially since the great general strike of October 2011, represents a strategic failure. It was not possible to stop the memoranda policies through parliamentary elections. The relative strengthening of the Left as a whole in the two elections was the result of the large mobilizations of social resistance from May 2010, with its high points of June and October 2011 as well as February 12. It must be understood that the resistance was not strong enough to bring down the memoranda policies. Thus it is not accidental that the strength or weakness of the entire left in the elections reflects the real balance of power between the main classes in Greek society. In this respect the election results are the political expression of the temporary defeat of the resistance movement.

The weakening of KKE in the elections can be partly explained by its resolute "isolation tactics" along with its strict refusal to cooperate with other left forces at any level. This is connected to a necessarily complete lack of any prospect designed to end the prevailing policy, whether it be by strengthening the resistance movement or by the (ultimately illusory) parliamentary path.

The SYRIZA leadership has taken clear steps to carve out space as a "left" alliance for the management of the existing political and social system—Euros—i.e. Greek capitalism—Euros—at the government level, particularly after May 6. Still, it is obvious that the ruling classes of Greece and the EU prefer to get along without the services of SYRIZA in this regard. The SYRIZA leadership has fully accepted the logic of the Troika credits and their principal legitimacy and thus the debt repayments, at the same time also the wage and pension cuts and the general lowering of living standards imposed by the first memorandum, as well as the prospect of remaining in the euro-zone. These things were seen as the primary objective of government policy, thus accepting the "legitimacy" of the extortionate dilemma posed by the ruling classes. In this way, the main demand of last year's movement "We owe nothing, we do not pay, we do not sell!" was completely diluted, or turned into its opposite. On the central issue of migration the SYRIZA leadership succumbed in large part to the prevailing policies and declared immigrants to be a "problem." The SYRIZA leadership has not said a single word about how the social resistance can be put back on its feet or how the deadly threat posed by the neo-Nazi hordes can be stopped.

For ANTARSYA the election results of June 17 are almost tantamount to a collapse. All of the weaknesses of this formation after May 6 have become blatantly clear—Euros—for example its lack of coherence at the central level as a result of an inability to overcome the egoism of various organizations, the weakness of the basic units of the local committees, an inability to confront the political situation after May 6, to take a stand and respond clearly and convincingly to the central issues. ANTARSYA must make the necessary self-criticism in the face of this defeat and draw the appropriate conclusions. It can hardly continue if it fails to do so. Only in this way will it be possible for ANTARSYA to develop as one of the main engines of the resistance movement and as the anti-capitalist and revolutionary pole of the left. There is no shortage of starting points for joint actions by the entire left in the spirit of a united front policy. The programmatic perspective for the battles ahead has, to a large degree, been correctly outlined by ANTARSYA. The class struggles will undoubtedly sharpen in the coming months. This is what the social resistance must prepare for.

June 21, 2012