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Greece

General strike resurrects workers movement

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It was enough for the PASOK government to disclose its central ideas on reform of the pension system for the social and political climate to change radically. It was as if the real menace of seeing the value of pensions halved and the retirement age going from 60 to 65 or even higher, brusquely awakened a long slumbering and fatalistic Greek society.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/greece_firemen_gs.jpg]

Striking firemen on the march

In the space of a few days, the ravaged and discredited trade union movement reoccupied the centre stage under the pressure of its angry rank and file. The proof of this long awaited reawakening was striking: the general strike and demonstrations of April 26 surpassed in their breadth the simple resurrection of the workers' movement and constituted a veritable founding event for the whole of the Greek left.

They were by far the biggest of the past 20 years (the CGT trade union confederation claimed even that they had no precedent since the end of the Second World War!).

Some days later, the demonstrations of Mayday offered the chance for a second explosion, almost as spectacular. And finally, the enormous success of the second general strike on May 17 confirmed the certainty that we were witnessing an unparalleled groundswell coming from the depths of society and the Greek workers' movement.

The consequences of this were a veritable social and political earthquake. First, the rank and file and trade union leaders linked to PASOK revolted against their government.

Panicking, the council of ministers withdrew all its proposals and promised the opening of a dialogue with the trade unions without preconditions. The crisis of the social democratic party was so profound that Prime Minister Kostas Simitis was even in a minority of the Executive Committee of PASOK!

Moreover, all the polls are clear: the fall in the popularity of PASOK is dizzying and this party, which for 20 years has registered electoral scores above 38%, has fallen below 27%!

Obviously, the affair is far from over to the advantage of the unions and Simitis can still regain his footing. However, nothing will be like it was before!

The personal prestige of the PM and his government has taken such a knock that it is hard to see how he can put things right in the months to come. Even more important, their neo-liberal policies will no longer be accepted as inevitable. The advance is certainly a big one and it already offers the premises for the reconstruction of both the trade union movement and the Greek left. Thus, under the pressure of rank and file employees, sectarianism has recoiled before the unity in action of the trade union movement.

Yet this rediscovered unity will remain fragile as long as the Communist Party (KKE) will not abandon definitively its temptation to found its own 'red' unions, or unless the trade union bureaucrats of PASOK refuse to participate in the trap of dialogue organised by the government under its conditions.

Finally, a lot remains to be done so that the Greek left can participate in this reawakening of the workers' movement,

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to recreate its lost credibility. For the instant, it is the right that profits, while the parties of the left remain impotent and incapable of devising an alternative policy to that of PASOK. In transforming radically the social facts of the problem, the current explosion of the anger of the wage earners offers the basis for the reconstruction of the trade union movement and the recomposition of the left.

The next steps will not be easy but henceforth one can count on the combativity of a working class which seems to identify with the most popular slogan of the recent demonstrations; people go forward and don't lower your heads, there is only one road: resistance and struggle!