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Greece

Alexis, what have you done with our victory?

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“61.3 % vote No to overthrow the system, 251 Yes for submission to the system” - that was Sunday’s headline on “Prin”, the newspaper of the NAR, a component of Antarsya and the main group of the Greek revolutionary left.

In itself, it clearly summarized the paradox of the situation, whereas on this Monday morning, the proposals of a 3rd memorandum approved a little while ago by the immense majority of Greek members of parliament (251 out of 300) have already been much exceeded by the demands of the vultures of the troika. While everything is being done on the part of the European institutions and the Greek institutional parties to have the No of July 5 forgotten, it is necessary to identify the requirements of this phase (“tragic” to use the term employed by Stathis Kouvelakis, even if the spectacle of the European debates brings to mind rather the Grand Guignol) to review the crucial importance of this vote.

A referendum for nothing?

In Greece but also elsewhere, the debates on the refusal of Tsipras to take into account the extraordinary No result tend to be translated into two directions: either a betrayal which would prove the counter-revolutionary character of Syriza, or a constrained but inevitable adaptation to circumstances too unfavourable to even the slightest initiatives of reform. If such discussions are normal, we have to go beyond them to make constructive, that is, credible and inspirational, proposals, based on the popular and class message of the referendum. This obliges us to repose the question: did the referendum reveal Tsipras’s great political savvy? In our view, no: it seems more to be an act of political discouragement by the Syriza leadership, seeing that all its proposals were successively rejected by a troika whose rules of operation Tsipras had accepted. Remember that the electoral program of Thessaloniki was a step backwards compared to that of Syriza. Once elected, Syriza abandoned this minimum program so as not to exceed the “red lines” (pensions, employment law).

However, each time, the pressure of the European bourgeoisie - the Nobel Prize winner Stiglitz has clearly shown that its motives were purely political - has pushed back the lines, and each time the government has said it would be ready to find an agreement with the troika. More than a total alignment on the capitalist program as was the case with social democracy, we must rather see here the extreme naivety of a reformist party with a radical minority that did not succeed in weighing on its orientation. Following a classic reformist tactic, rather than calling for the mobilization of European workers and youth to force back the troika, the Syriza leadership called an improvised referendum - if the Yes vote had prevailed, we can think that Tsipras would have handed over the government to the right to recover his health in opposition, and if the No won, this would help better negotiate the demands imposed by the troika (a draft 3rd memorandum having been communicated to Brussels before the vote).

However, what has surprised everyone, including the revolutionary left who had played a key role in the mobilization for the No vote, was the profound movement demanding a clear break with austerity: to remain in Europe, but not the Europe of the vultures and the oligarchy, rather the Europe of the workers, of young people, of solidarity. Even if it did not emerge with these slogans, this is certainly the first time in the history of Europe that a demand such as this has emerged at such a mass level, and of course, this mass movement totally eclipsed the small mobilization in favour of a Yes vote, benefiting from media support for the maintenance of the Europe of the privileged.

Hence the shameful nature of the position of the KKE (the Greek Communist Party) calling effectively for a spoiled ballot (and on the night of the referendum, its leader Koutsoumbas wanted to address both those who had voted No

and those who had voted Yes). Hence also the attitude of the voters of the Nazi group Golden Dawn who called for a No vote without any presence in the campaign: the polls showed that 60% of its supporters voted Yes, a sign of the class polarization of this campaign!

On the evening of July 5, it was soon clear that the No vote had won, and after two hours there was a popular tide, with a huge spontaneous gathering on Syntagma Square. However, it had to wait over five hours for Tsipras's statement: we can imagine not only the surprise, shared the whole country, but also the embarrassment of the Syriza leadership. However, while the right collapsed, with its leader Samaras resigning immediately, working class neighbourhoods were celebrating this demand to break with the "rules" of austerity, Tsipras's statement immediately had the effect of a cold shower: rather than calling to prolong the mobilization, Tsipras broke this huge victory with a call for national unity and a meeting of the leaders of the party the next day, to gain more support for the demands which remained those of a new memorandum.

Possible consequences of a vote betrayed

In this respect, it is difficult not to speak of treason, which reminds us of another betrayal: in 2013, when secondary level teachers voted for a strike in relation to the Greek matriculation exams ("panellinies"), this decision was rejected by the leadership of the Olme union, namely by the currents of Pasok, the right and Syriza, the KKE having rejected the strike from the beginning, only the current formed notably by Antarsya voting for the continuation of the strike and respect for the vote of the teachers. Already, at the time, Syriza's fear of finding themselves in a situation outside the institutions was apparent. It is the same today, with consequences which are far more serious, if the current course is not reversed by the demonstrations. In effect, there are already, outside the vultures in Brussels, at least three winners: the KKE, whose leadership had been discredited during the vote, plays on the theme of "I told you so". Already, on July 10, the cortege of the KKE trade union current in the demonstration against the yes vote before parliament was very big and highly mobilized, on a very sectarian basis.

Another winner as possible: the Nazis, who could take advantage of a possible nationalist upsurge based on disillusionment. It should be said that with the trials of the Golden Dawn leaders being postponed, they are at liberty, and racist attacks have resumed. Other winners: the parties of reaction which, on the evening of July 5, did not expect so much. Thus, when one hears the leader of a right group, Theodorakis (nothing to do with the composer who called for a No vote), one wonders if it is not him who is Prime Minister. Moreover, the European leaders welcome this, to show their very special concept of democratic sovereignty.

But of course, the big loser is the Greek people and especially workers and young people: the Tsipras memorandum means attacks on pensions, the suppression of the small increase in the minimum wage in the autumn, privatization with redundancies, the return of the evaluation sanction in the public sector - that is, just the opposite of the meaning of the vote of July 5 and the great hope that emerged from the huge gatherings of July 3. With of course a huge risk if the anti-austerity mobilizations do not extend: disillusionment accompanied by a nationalist surge could help the Nazis bounce back, and smash the hopes of a radical left in Greece and Europe, without revolutionaries benefiting in any way. That is why what is being played out in Greece must give rise to enormous mobilizations in the country but also in the whole of Europe!

For an anti-austerity movement everywhere in Europe!

The vote on Friday in parliament has allowed us to see to what point this parliament is out of key with popular

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desires: the parties of the former government have voted yes, as well as their new accomplice Potami, and Syriza's ally, Anel. The KKE voted no, as well as Golden Dawn, but it is interesting to see the details of the votes of Syriza deputies: the vast majority voted Yes (251 out of 300), two voted no (members of DEA), eight abstained (including the ministers who lead the Left Platform, Lafazanis and Stratoulis, and the president of the Parliament, Konstantopoulou, as well as the former ERT journalist, Kyritsis), while seven were absent. Among those who voted yes, 15 were members of the Left Platform, who said they did not want to bring the government down by voting no.

Thus, little dispute on the part of Syriza deputies faced with this negation of the popular vote. And once again, the official argument of Syriza to justify all its setbacks: let us get on with the negotiations, it will be a rotten agreement but once done, we will finally govern, which we have not been able to do for five months. Certainly, the polls continue to show an advance of Syriza in relation to the right, but the real question is elsewhere: even if Syriza can govern – and nothing is less sure - this would be with what politics? This morning, the new Franco-German demands relate to the now officially recognized loss of sovereignty!

So the stakes are enormous, and the European left has before it tremendous responsibilities, which involve obviously resolute and unitary action. In Greece itself, the mobilizations have been maintained – on Friday, thousands gathered in front of parliament at the call of Antarsya, anarchist trade unionists, PAME (the trade union current of the KKE), and the left of Syriza; on Sunday, a rally called by Antarsya and rank and file trade unions – and must intensify. It is the massive and resolved No which must serve as a compass, in an approach linking all the currents of the left but especially all the unorganized, without forgetting an approach calling on all the left parties, whether or not in government, to work together on a policy of breaking with austerity. The veteran Manolis Glezos has called for respect for the massive No, while the old Communist activist Bitsakis expressed the desire for gatherings of hundreds of thousands of people in the cities of Greece.

More than ever, it is clear that the break with austerity must be at the centre of demands, with a European dimension, which would be the best means of continuing to envisage a Euro zone, on the basis of economic policies based on solidarity and not the search for profits of the French and German banks or the tax havens at the heart of Europe.