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Greece

June 17: A temporary and unstable solution for the Greek political system

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The elections of May 6th created an upheaval of the Greek political system, opening a period of deep crisis. The shrinkage of PASOK, the disintegration of New Democracy (ND), the unexpected emergence of SYRIZA as the second-place finisher, and the opening of a prospect for the formation of a government of left parties set off alarm bells not only for the Greek ruling class but also for their European counterparts. [This article is from the latest issue of *Spartakos*, journal of the OKDE, Greek section of the Fourth International.]

The fear of a Greek exit from the euro-zone was the theme sounded over and over again, and with increasing intensity, by Greek and European political leaders, by the bankers, and by the bourgeois media as the election day of June 17 approached—in order to terrorize the population and stop the electoral drift to the left. On June 17 SYRIZA benefited primarily from a continued decline of other left parties and of PASOK. But it failed to decisively win over those sections of the working and middle classes which remained trapped by the dominant bourgeois ideology.

The results of June 17 confirm the fact that the Greek political system is balancing on a tightrope. The fear of what would happen if the country left the euro-zone was the only effective argument—leading the majority of the middle class to again rally around ND, the main traditional right party. At the same time an important part of this social layer, having been hit hard by the economic crisis, voted again the new far right party “Independent Greeks,” while the neo-Nazi “Golden Dawn” kept its support intact. This demonstrates the emergence of a neo-Nazi movement within the petty bourgeois strata of Greek society for the first time. Even the most skeptical left “analysts” have to admit the reality of this development.

The international scene

In the interval between the two successive electoral campaigns, the possibility of a left government coming to power in a small European country caused tremendous economic and political turbulence on an international level: Stock markets declined; the euro fell against the dollar; a wave of panic swept through the ruling classes, and hysteria through the international bourgeois media. The prospect of a left government in Greece and of a challenge to the terms of the memorandum were directly connected to Greece’s exit from the euro-zone by the bankers and the “lenders”—an exit which, as they themselves acknowledge, might have uncontrollable effects on the global economic balance. The potential domino effect of successive failures in other countries (Spain, Portugal, etc.) is a possibility that strikes panic among political leaders throughout the world, including Obama, Putin and the Chinese leadership. So if the results of the Greek election of May 6th demonstrated the frightening instability of the global capitalist economy despite desperate attempts by governments to extract themselves from the cycle of crisis, then the results of June 17 brought a huge sigh of relief despite the widely admitted fact that the situation remains extremely fluid and the “victory” of the main right party is only temporary.

The political leaders of Europe, having secured for themselves the ability to maintain their luxurious life-style, nevertheless have a major public relations problem in the context of how hopeless the situation is of so many Greek people who already lack basic necessities or are drowning in bank debts and taxes. However, the continuous crude interventions of foreign leaders and bankers in order to terrorize the Greek people revealed how vulnerable and unstable the institutions of bourgeois democracy become whenever the real interests of the ruling classes are at stake. And we leave aside how completely powerless institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament proved to be—confronted with the decisions of bankers and industrialists of the strongest European country, who do not hesitate to drain resources and gain profits from the weaker economies during the

crisis.

In this way the ruling classes of Europe, with Germany playing first fiddle, do not just want to wall off the rest of Europe from the Greek economic crisis—which seems to be very difficult in itself despite the debt “haircuts” and the successive memorandum contracts. What they fear most of all is a development of popular movements of resistance to their policy at a pan-European level, which would upset their strategic plan for resolving the economic crisis by totally destroying all previous gains of the working class.

Taken together this reflects the absolute commitment of European political leaders to a policy of brutal attacks on workers' incomes and their living standards. This policy is imposed by the desperate need of capital to achieve a massive increase in the rate of exploitation, which will allow profits to recover at the level of the “real” economy. This need is unambiguously expressed in the unrelenting austerity imposed by the memoranda and also in the financial policy of a “hard” euro.

The development of the resistance movement

In fact, the elections took place under the increasing pressure of popular indignation and a fear on the part of the ruling class that a continuous expansion of the popular resistance movement could begin to take the shape of self-organization. The upsurge broke out last year as “the movement of the public squares” and continued with the creation of hundreds of popular assemblies and initiatives of social solidarity, even with the creation and evolution of the “coordination of the rank and file unions.” The massive and militant presence of this coordination in the major strike mobilizations was a serious challenge to the bureaucratic leaderships of the two “official” trade unions confederations, GSEE (private sector) and ADEDY (public services).

The movement of popular assemblies, however, remained largely dispersed and has not, to this moment, managed to create anything at the level of central coordination. The movement failed to establish a consistent and intense presence throughout this period. It culminated in the major strikes during the middle of October last year and in the largely spontaneous October 28th *parades*—which eventually led to the fall of the Papandreou government and the creation of the “black front” government composed by the three “parties of memorandum”: PASOK, New Democracy and LAOS. It also culminated in the massive demonstration on February 12 that launched the decomposition of the same three parties and initiated the pre-election period. The imposition of a new package of austerity measures planned for June seemed impossible without a new parliamentary authorization.

With the election on May 6 the ruling class hoped to achieve at least a temporary respite from popular anger and gain an opportunity to form a coalition government put together by the remaining two or three “memorandum parties,” a government which could impose the new measures and continue the work of demolishing any temporary gains by workers. But the results of the May elections prevented, at least temporarily, the actual implementation of this plan. The results of June 17, on the other hand, offer them a new opportunity to go ahead, but under less favorable conditions. The narrow majority of the two “memorandum” parties (ND and PASOK) and the involvement of the supposedly left DIMAR (“Democratic Left”) mean that the new government will have a highly unstable character.

The political forces

SYRIZA, faced with a fierce attack against it by all of the bourgeois forces, desperately tried to articulate a political

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program of neo-Keynesianism: government intervention in support of the welfare state and a redistribution of income through the adjustment of fiscal policy. The room for maneuver in order to pursue such a policy under the conditions of the present economic crisis, however, is nonexistent. Tsipras tried again to raise the prospect of “reforms” (i.e. the same ideas that have been repeated so often in pre-election promises during previous decades by socialists and social democrats) in his speeches, and presented his own version of this program before the election of June 17: the “restructuring of production,” the modernization of the state structures and of the tax system. This is a proposal for a modernization of the bourgeois system in the middle of its present crisis and for working within the dominant mechanisms of that system, i.e. the EU and the financial policy of the “hard euro”. This is completely impossible.

SYRIZA not only fails to reject these mechanisms, it even hopes to reform them at a European level in the interests of all European workers. SYRIZA claims that all this can be carried through by a team of capable and enlightened political leaders of the Left—economists and experts ready to transform the state mechanisms. They will audit the “onerous” debt identify what “fair” share of it will be paid! They will denounce the loan contracts “in the area of politics and will renegotiate the loan contracts according to the law”! This is a project that, as we have seen many times before, leads either to the integration of ambitious individual leaders into the dominant bourgeois political system or else their forced expulsion from it.

The difference in the present case is that the pace of economic developments is much faster and the social processes much stronger and more contradictory. The utopian character of such a program is perceived by large layers of the working classes, who either reluctantly support SYRIZA or remain trapped by the dominant bourgeois ideology.

The popular movement, the development of mass initiative and self-organization, the development of social solidarity—i.e. the items which are essential for the policy of a worker’s government—cannot be found anywhere either in Tsipras’s programmatic speeches or in his post-election statements.

To transform SYRIZA into a force that is, one hand, based upon the social movement and, on the other, actually promoting the development of the movement, including popular assemblies and workers’ committees in the workplaces, would require a policy that includes the pursuit of real power by the workers, not only governmental power. That means the immediate cessation of payment of the debt, the nationalization of the banking system and large enterprises under workers’ control, along with a break from the mechanisms of the capitalist EU and the euro. Such an orientation surpasses by far the logic and political limits of a purely reformist formation such as the SYN (Synaspismos) party, which is the dominant force in SYRIZA.

On the contrary we heard many promises that largely remind us of the usual pre-election rhetoric presented by bourgeois politicians. Cultivating mass expectations for welfare benefits and illusions about a painless parliamentary exit from the crisis essentially disarms and deactivates the mass movement. Even worse, as routinely emphasized by the leadership of the Communist Party, the frustration due to a failure of a future left government to realize its pre-election promises can have dramatic and irreversible effects on mass consciousness. The current electoral rise of the far right would then be the prelude to a massive shift to these parties.

The audacity of the “Golden Dawn” (GD) gangs in the streets of Patras and Athens a few days before June 17 offered a foretaste of what it would mean to have a nightmarish totalitarian future and a regime of absolute terror. Today fascist terrorism turns against defenseless immigrants, but tomorrow it will be used against the workers’ movement, trade unionists, left organizations and their rank and in order to crush any trace of collective social resistance. The gangs of GD have already been accepted by a significant proportion of the middle class which has been impoverished or threatened with destitution. The bullying and the supposedly anti-systemic rhetoric of the fascists charms an important part of youth who are looking for a dynamic direct outlet from the decaying bourgeois system. They cannot understand that GD is the poisoned fruit of that decadent bourgeois system, the irrational logic

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of capitalism pushed to its most extreme. Boundless individualism, the dissolution of all forms of collective social solidarity, hatred of foreigners, and a grudge against anyone who opposes them, lead to the invocation and active emergence of the darkest prejudices surviving in today's society.

The CP leadership entered a period of sectarian frenzy following the election on May 6. It constantly describes the terrible suffering that will inevitably occur from a rise of SYRIZA to government power and, at best, washes its hands like Pontius Pilate. According to CP general secretary Papariga, the responsibility for any further development belongs exclusively to the people who have not yet acquired the necessary maturity for social change. The CP bureaucracy is unable to accept its responsibilities, faced with the seriousness of the situation, let alone recognize any genuine expression of popular spontaneous self-organization and self-motivation. It cannot understand that the rapid developments directly affect the consciousness of the popular masses and also require immediate positive political proposals. The CP leadership simply repeats alleged Marxist prophecies about the "immaturity of the people," to emphasize how the depth of the crisis of capitalism determines the outcome, although with a considerable delay, and constantly denounces SYRIZA for tomorrow's betrayals. It is almost certain that the election results of June 17 will plunge the Communist Party into an internal crisis which may have some positive results for the working class movement.

The development of a radical left force that will be able to intervene decisively and effectively in politics, which has a perspective of doing more than just pushing a future leftist government to be steadfast, but rather works to keep alive the energy of protest and focus on the organization of the mass movement is an issue of life and death for the popular resistance. That is why ANTARSYA participated independently in the elections of June 17. What ANTARSYA needs to do through the electoral process is develop its structures and consolidate its ties with the masses. The election result of May 6 showed that is possible for ANTARSYA to appeal to broad sections of the population. The election results of June 17, however, demonstrate that its consolidation of mass support is still in its infancy. ANTARSYA failed to keep the allegiance of those who voted for it on May 6 based on its program. On June 17 these voters turned en masse to the "realistic" perspective of a SYRIZA Government.

ANTARSYA had been excluded from the formal bourgeois sceneâ€”of politics and media debateâ€”which would have allowed an appeal to wider layers of workers. At the same time the neo-Nazis were permitted to participate. But hundreds of ANTARSYA fighters are constantly present in the daily class struggle on all fronts. Without doubt they are the most honest and militant elements of the left and of the Greek labor movement, a layer that has been working for years against the dominant ideology of neoliberalism, also to resist the reformist misery of the SYN party and the CP's sectarianism. They actively participate in the rank and file unions, in popular assemblies and movements of social solidarity.

The very existence of ANTARSYA as a coalition of fighters from different political traditions and with different historical references gives a vivid example of how it is actually possible to create a broad front of workers' resistance. ANTARSYA currently is the only political force that not only can avert, through its development, a future dramatic decline of the labor movement. But also and most importantly, it is currently the only force that can equip the workers movement with a political strategy that will lead to victory.