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European elections

Neoliberalism flanked by the populist right

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These European elections have first confirmed a broad popular abstention. Nearly 60% of voters did not go to the ballot boxes. This abstention can give only a deformed vision of the real relationship of forces in Europe. But it confirms the crisis of legitimacy of the European Union and of the governing parties who implement their policies within this framework.

Other main tendencies emerge, initially a rise of the right across Europe.

The right won in the big countries where it governs, in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Poland, Austria, and Hungary. In Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, and Cyprus, the parties of the right also came first.

This right wing surge is accompanied in a series of countries by the rise of populist right and far right forces, in particular in Holland, where the far right Islamophobic and anti-European party of the deputy Geert Wilders obtained 16.4% of the vote and 4 MEPs. In Austria, Finland and Hungary, the forces of the far right which have been involved in anti-immigrant campaigns also gained support. In the United Kingdom, the British National Party obtained 2 MEPs, with 6.7% of the vote. Greece also saw a breakthrough for the far right, with 7.2% for the LAOS organization.

Social democracy fell back, in particular in the countries where it governs: in Britain, Spain and Portugal. It experienced a veritable rout in Germany where it scored only 21%, one of the weakest electoral scores for the Social Democratic Party, not to mention the collapse of the Socialist Party in France. It only gained votes in Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Slovakia and Malta.

In a series of countries the crisis of the large traditional apparatuses of the right and social democratic left has created broad space for a series of forces going from the Greens to the radical left, passing through a whole series of left reformist forces.

The Greens, with nearly 60 elected MEPs, emerge strengthened from these elections. One of the most significant breakthroughs being that of the alliance led by Cohn-Bendit in France.

The Danish organization "Folkebevægelsen mod EU" (People's Movement against the EU), by centring its campaign against the European Union, indeed against Europe, had an MEP re-elected, Søren Søndergaard, also a member of the Red-Green Alliance and the Fourth International.

Parties like Die Linke in Germany, the SP in the Netherlands or the Front de Gauche in France maintained or increased their electoral positions without making new breakthroughs.

The Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy won 3.23% and will not have any representatives in the European Parliament.

In Britain the results of the radical left were disappointing, with the NO2EU list scoring 1%, as did the SLP of Arthur Scargill.

Syriza in Greece won 4.7% of the votes and one MEP, and thus did not achieve its goal of electing 3 MEPs.

The NPA in France consolidated its electorate. It progressed compared to the results of the LCR-LO lists in the last European elections of 2004 (+2.3%) without gaining any MEPs.

For a number of organizations of the anti-capitalist left, this was their electoral baptism of fire: the Polish Party of Labour, Izquierda Anticapitalista in the Spanish State, Workers' initiative in Sweden, the LCR-PSL in Belgium, the Scottish Socialist Party, Antarsya (??????), the anti-capitalist coalition in Greece, campaigned well but their results did not exceed 1%.

On the anti-capitalist left, we should highlight the result of the SP in Ireland which elected one MEP, following the No campaign against the Lisbon treaty, and especially the excellent results of the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal which made a real breakthrough, in fact the only breakthrough of the radical or anti-capitalist left, with 10.73% of the votes and 3 MEPs.

It is always difficult to draw global lessons on relations of social and political forces from a poll marked by abstention by almost 60% of voters. Nevertheless, the first socio-economic effects of the crisis- redundancies, explosion of unemployment, lower purchasing power - did not produce movements of electoral radicalisation, on the left or in an anti-capitalist sense. The breakthrough for Bloco de esquerda constitutes an exception.

There is a paradox which sees the right-wing neoliberal political formations that have instigated anti-social attacks flanked by the populist or far right emerging strengthened from the European poll. We might have thought that the crisis would favour anti-capitalist ideas. The situation is more complicated. Social resistance, which has not led yet to overall struggles of employees and youth, does not mechanically produce an anti-capitalist alternative. Social democracy is mired in crisis, freeing up new spaces, but the development of the anti-capitalist left remains unequal. The beginnings for a series of organizations are promising. It is now necessary to pursue a politics which stimulates social mobilizations against the economic and ecological crisis and the accumulation of forces to make anti-capitalist solutions increasingly credible and this in complete independence from the old leaderships of the traditional left.