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Greece

Overcoming division

- IV Online magazine - 2001 - IV332 - June 2001 -

Publication date: Sunday 3 June 2001

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Profoundly divided, disorientated and marginalised on the political chessboard, the Greek left has been in decline for a good decade or so, that is since its participation in the ephemeral government coalition led by the conservative right (the New Democracy party). Since then, its haemorrhage has been incessant and culminating in the disastrous electoral results of one year ago: its three parliamentary parties gained in total less than 10% of votes, something unprecedented in the post-war history of the Greek left!

It was then almost natural that increasingly numerous voices rose everywhere against the left's disunity and sectarianism and in favour of the dialogue and unity of action. One thing was - and remains - very clear: so long as division reigns, the small and big components of the left can do practically nothing against the steamroller of triumphant neo-liberalism driven by the governing social democracy.

However, indications were that the concerns of the 'people of the left' would not be enough to oblige its incorrigible leaderships to change tack. The reason was simple: the pathological and brutal sectarianism of the Communist Party (KKE) combined with the more subtle sectarianism of Synaspismos [Euro-communist split from the KKE-ed.], but also with the self-sufficiency of a far left which was cut off from the live forces of the organised workers' movement.

Just after last year's elections some militants took the first steps towards uniting all those who wanted to act concretely in favour of unity of action and the recomposition of the left.

It was the 'Initiative for the Refoundation of the Left' launched in September 2000 by the AKOA (Communist and Ecological Left Renewal), the theoretical review *Theses* and some militants of the Greek section (OKDE) of the Fourth International. Almost at the same time, the same forces, together with some left militants from Synaspismos, launched the monthly review *Manifesto* which aimed to be a forum for the unitary, internationalist and radical tendencies of the entire left, both parliamentary and extra parliamentary.

Only eight months later, we can speak of a success. The initial nucleus, joined by the three left tendencies of Synaspismos, has created 'The Space of Left Dialogue and Common Action' which brings together the following forces: Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left and Progress, 3.2% in the elections parliamentary and 5.6% in the EU elections), KEDA (Movement of the Democratic Unitary Left comprising the prestigious leaders and trade union cadres recently expelled or resigned from the KKE), 'The Initiative for the Refoundation of the Left' and its components, the DEA (Workers Internationalist Left, recent split from the Trotskyist SEK, sister organisation of the British Socialist Workers Party), the Network for the Defence of Social and Political Rights (an autonomous social movement which enjoys great prestige), Green Politics (ecologists), the Alternative Ecologists and Left Politics.

Within the 'Space' there are independent and unorganised personalities as well as the DHKKI party (Democratic and Social Movement, former split from PASOK, 2.7% at the parliamentary elections and 7.9% in the European elections) and the SEK (Socialist Workers Party) with provisional observer status.

The KKE leadership, faithful to Stalinist traditions, has used the presence in the 'Space' of the KEDA and ex-members of its political bureau - Yannis Theonas (resigned as Euro deputy last January) and Mitsos Kostopoulos (ex-president of the parliamentary group of the KKE and ex-secretary general of the CGT union confederation) - to justify its non-participation.

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The breadth and the diversity of the forces involved in the 'Space' has exceeded the hopes of the initiators of this unitary process. What appeared unthinkable only some months ago became reality in May 2001! For the first time in decades, the forces of the Greek left decided to build a unitary framework so as to begin to engage in dialogue and act in common.

Obviously no one can deny that the problems faced will be difficult, that a lot remains to be done so that this first step towards the recomposition of the Greek left acquires the dynamic which is necessary to break definitively with the traditional sectarianisms of the big and small party bureaucracies. Yet enthusiasm and a climate of confidence have dominated the first meetings the 'Space'.

By common agreement of its components, the 'Space' remains open to any new adhesion, and it has chosen to test immediately its capacities of intervention on the following fronts:

- ▶ The frontal confrontation of the workers movement and the government over the neo-liberal reform of the pension and social security system;
- ▶ The mobilisation against the new "anti-terrorist" law that limits dangerously democratic rights and liberties;
- ▶ The preparation of a mass Greek participation at the international demonstration in Genoa against the G8 and neo-liberal globalisation.

These three initial combats also offer an insight into the political priorities of the 'Space': the intransigent defence of the social gains of the workers' movement and democratic rights and liberties as well as an active internationalism and participation in the international movement of resistance to neo-liberal globalisation. Despite their numerically small forces, the Greek comrades of the Fourth International have played a key role in the preparation of the 'Space' and the launch of the review Manifesto. Evidently, the time is right for such initiatives, even when they come from small militant groups, on condition that a correct analysis of the period is combined with an approach devoid of sectarianism, a total commitment of forces and, why not, boldness and the taking of - more or less, well - calculated risks.