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Greece

# Problems of far left recomposition

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**In IV 332 of June 2001 we published an article by Georges Mitralias on the establishment in Greece of "The space of left dialogue and common action". [1]** Comrades from the leadership of the OKDE, the Greek section of the Fourth International, have indicated that they do not share the viewpoint put forward in this article and they present here their assessment of the problems of left and far left recomposition in Greece.

Some profound changes in the workers' movement and in class-consciousness have taken place in Greek society over the last 10 years. Xenophobia and racism have developed as "natural" reflexes to big waves of immigration, while nationalism and a return to the old principles of Greek Orthodox Christianity have been dominant themes in the massive mobilizations around the question of Macedonia. Populism and religious fanaticism characterize the discourse of the popular archbishop of Athens, Christodoulos.

The ruling Greek Socialist Movement (PASOK) with its "modernizing" wing in ascendancy since the mid 1990s, has evolved to the right, applying a neo-liberal programme with disastrous social consequences.

In this climate, the partial resistance of the working class, concretised in strikes and mobilizations of seafarers, teachers, peasants, bank employees and students, has been suppressed in the name of a neo-liberal programme portrayed as "the only realistic way". The traditional left parties have been incapable of responding to the new problems emerging over the last decade, hence their electoral decline or stagnation.

However, this unfavourable political climate was reversed last spring in huge mobilizations of the working class in defence of the pension and social security system. The "socialist" PASOK government was forced to withdraw its proposals, which was a first since it began to apply its neo-liberal programme under the leadership of Kostas Simitis. This has led to frictions and chain reactions inside the party, the trade union bureaucracy has exerted pressure and finally the left wing of the "old party" has reappeared. Moreover, the Stock Exchange has suffered particularly low rates for 2 years, creating a sentiment of disappointment in the broad sectors of the middle class who had "invested" their money and hopes in economic growth and the stock market. At the same time, all the polls on voting intentions show PASOK at its lowest ebb. In this very difficult situation, Kostas Simitis has decided to convene an extraordinary congress of PASOK for this autumn.

However, this sudden decision has provoked instability and political uncertainty. The party of the traditional right, New Democracy (ND), have followed an undisguised populist line and this despite the neo-liberal sentiments of its members. Its opposition to the government is characterized by a moral denunciation of the "socialist" government and its incompetent administration. This line has had some success and the ND hopes to gain more votes than PASOK for the first time in 10 years.

The two traditional "official" parties of the Greek left, the KKE (Communist Party of Greece) and Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left and Progress, of Eurocommunist origin), have once again proved incapable of expressing the popular discontent and still more of inspiring a perspective of social resistance or a left path out of the economic and social crisis. An alternative proposed by the reformist left seems then unrealistic and without perspective.

## The death of the "official left"

## Problems of far left recomposition

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After the break-up of the eastern European régimes the Greek Communist Party (KKE) enclosed itself in an orientation of the purest Stalinist type. What characterizes it today are the rhythms of the survival of its bureaucracy and a sectarianism evident in its national orientation and systematic use of an ultra-left discourse. Thus the KKE leadership tried to organize a separate demonstration on Mayday parallel to that organized by the GSEE (General Federation of Workers' Trade Unions), but under the pressure of the enormous mobilizations, it was obliged to join the central demonstration organized by the GSEE.

The party leadership has developed a hostile attitude towards everything which comes from the European imperialist countries including the European workers' movement and international campaigns! In spite of that and under the pressure of its working class base, the KKE was obliged to take part in the recent mobilizations against capitalist globalisation (Prague, Nice, Genoa), but it has kept its political and organizational distance from the other forces of the Greek left, organizing totally separate campaigns. Thus, it denounced the central slogan of the "Greek committee for Genoa" which was "human beings before profit" as reformist and replaced it by "human beings against profit"!

Nonetheless, the KKE concentrates the majority of politically conscious workers, continues to be the biggest workers' party of the Greek left (around 5.6% at the national elections) and continues to enjoy the support of left-inclined youth.

Thus even if a real political dialogue with the leadership of the KKE on the recomposition of the left is impossible today, any dialogue on the "unity of left forces" in Greece must take the KKE into account.

As the most important rival of the KKE, the leadership of Synaspismos is fighting for its survival in parliament since its electoral influence fluctuates around 3%. However, the working class roots of this party are relatively weak while it has a certain implantation among the intellectual middle classes. The ideological origin and social composition of the leadership relegates this party to reformist options, punctuated by zigzags, following a pro-European line and cultivating many illusions on the perspective of the bourgeois European institutions.

Unfortunately, the Synaspismos leadership was the architect and the most vigorous supporter of the right-left coalition government in 1989 (led by Tzannetakis) in opposition to the old "socialist" leadership of PASOK. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Synaspismos leadership participated in the first phase of the nationalist mobilizations in favour of 'Greek Macedonia'.

Later, under the pressure of its own "modernizing" wing and after "clarifications" inspired by the views of the most "enlightened" parties of the Greek ruling class, Synaspismos adopted a more pacifistic and less nationalistic line. That was true not only in relation to Macedonia but also the wars in ex-Yugoslavia and Greek-Turkish relations. Behind this lies the leadership's medium-term project: its participation in a governmental coalition of 'realistic modernization' with the equivalent tendencies inside PASOK.

The Synaspismos leadership is quite obviously open to any type of cooperation at all in order to maintain its parliamentary existence. It is in relation to these perspectives that one should understand its participation in the campaigns against capitalist globalisation: they offer it the chance to remind people that Synaspismos once had a real left profile and to appeal to the radical youth without however taking on any serious and immediate obligation.

For all these reasons, it is relatively easy for virtually any far left group to have some form of cooperation with Synaspismos. However, because of its reformist nature and its parliamentary orientation, it is also impossible for any radical left group to envisage a political agreement with Synaspismos for the formation of a stable alliance in the perspective of the next national elections.

## New perspectives for the far left?

Two of the most important far left organizations are the NAR (New Left Current) and AKOA (Renewing Communist and Ecological Left). Indeed these two currents represents a sort of projection of the division of the official left into the far left. The NAR was created by the Communist youth (KNE) in reaction to the participation of the KKE in the Tzannetakis government in 1989. The NAR proclaimed itself the true continuity of the genuine Leninist tradition and since the beginning has built around itself a little "anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist front". This "front" seeks to defend an independent class orientation and an anti-nationalist, anti-militarist practice. However, the necessary condition for participation in this "front" is to support the anti-European positions of the NAR, which rules out a good number of far left organizations. The sectarian approach of the NAR is to consider that it is always preferable to organize separate meetings and campaigns of the "front". It also rejects the unity of the trade union movement, preferring to support the construction of "combative" and "pure" red unions. Around this little "front" one finds several old Maoist organizations and a dogmatic group of "Healyite" origin. Its dynamic and electoral influence have fallen constantly for the last 10 years. However, the influence of this organization is relatively important in the student movement.

The AKOA is a smaller organization created in reaction to the "Communist refounders" current formerly inside the old Eurocommunist party (the so-called KKE interior, in the 1970s) who accentuated their drift to the right with the formation of Synaspismos in 1987-88. The AKOA continues to identify with the Eurocommunist tradition while strengthening its links with tendencies and individuals inside Synaspismos. These links were definitively reinforced when the AKOA supported Synaspismos at the national elections of the past year. While the attitude of the AKOA towards the other forces of the far left is relatively open it has no interest in an independent policy of an alliance of the radical left with a perspective of class independence. It is clear that the persistence of AKOA in this orientation stems essentially from its reformist origins. Moreover, the AKOA has taken the decision with other smaller groups having similar political views (like the ecologists, the KEDA and others) to build an alliance with Synaspismos in a common electoral goal as well as at a more general political level. Which does not stop the AKOA from continuing to participate in anti-racist, anti-fascist, or anti-capitalist globalisation movements and in far left campaigns. However, the recent alliance around "The space of left dialogue and common action"<sup>1</sup> is an attempt to give a political and electoral horizon to the organizations and groups which are found in the slipstream of Synaspismos: Synaspismos seems indeed to need this type of collaboration in its competition with the KKE, presenting thus a more left wing image.

There are other radical left organizations with a more revolutionary programme, like a part of the organization Diktyo (Network of movements for the defence of civic and political rights): this group has some significant activity in defence of immigrants and has played an important role in the organization of the "antiracist Festival". In addition, the DEA (Internationalist Workers' Left) which has recently left the SEK (Socialist Workers Party, sister organization of the British SWP) has just decided to participate in the "Space".

The price to pay for this type of collaboration could be high for the risk of subordination to the reformist strategy of Synaspismos is undeniable. From this point of view it has been very fashionable in some circles of the Greek revolutionary left to support alliances of the "Space" type in a not very responsible manner, in order to "overcome the divisions between reformists and revolutionaries". But what can be the meaning of all this if not the abandonment of any attempt to build independent revolutionary organizations distinct from the existing reformist parties? [\[2\]](#)

## "Initiative" and other attempts at cooperation

Unhappily the NAR and the AKOA, the two most important components of the far left, have been incapable of redefining their orientations during the past 10 years which has prevented them from creating a real organization implanted in the working class, immigrants and radicalised youth. Their mutual hostility has made any electoral

alliance impossible.

In response to this difficult situation and on the ruins of the last attempt at electoral unification of the far left, the "Initiative for the unity of the radical left" was founded immediately after the last national elections. The Diktyo, other groups of very different origin (Stalinist groups, the OKDE - Greek section of the Fourth International - and also other independent groups) have taken part in the creation of the Initiative, which is open to all the groups and organizations of the far left.

The Initiative tries to establish stable relations and a representative internal system which would give a living example of political coexistence for the other forces of the far left. The central problem of functioning of the Initiative right now is the priority given by most participants to local work and to work in the trade unions. However, one should not forget either their relative indifference towards international questions and campaigns.

If the general tendency for the far left in the past 10 years has been stagnation, a case apart is constituted by the SEK, which has developed in a manner completely separated from the rest of the far left, entirely enclosed in its own world and discourse.

But since some of its predictions on the imminence of revolutionary situations East and West have proved totally erroneous, internal frictions have sharpened. This led to a split this year which has given birth to a new organization, the DEA. This new organization has played a decisive role in the "Greek Committee for Genoa". Both the SEK and DEA love to discuss with Synaspismos but without any perspective of recomposition of the revolutionary left.

At the same time the right turn of PASOK and its subordination to the interests of the ruling class have led to the old Trotskyist organization Xekinima ("Beginning", linked to the British Militant) leaving PASOK in order to participate openly in the activities and mobilizations of the far left.

Thus the open existence of organizations with a culture different from that of the reformist parties, incarnated by the SEK, DEA or Xekinima and their direct participation in the campaigns of the far left creates a hope and new perspectives for the first time in many years. The far left has been encouraged by the rise of the student movement in May-June 2001 which followed the mobilizations of the working class in April/May.

This movement was expressed in mass demonstrations and occupations in numerous Greek universities and the leadership of the movement rested on an alliance of far left students (NAR, Initiative, independent militants). They have experienced great success in the big student assemblies, voting through motions against the advice of the traditional organizations (ND, PASOK, KKE, Synaspismos) and organizing street demonstrations.

## Key questions

In recent months the political climate has changed, the developments inside the far left have accelerated. The need for unity of action is now understood by the majority of far left militants and it has become obvious that there exists a certain pressure on the leaders to build a common campaign with other parties and organizations of the radical left. The proposals for unity of the far left come from different directions but the real intentions and the discourse employed are not always very clear. It appears for example that unitary work between militants of Maoist or Stalinist origin and those from the tradition of the European working class is an indispensable condition to change their attitude which is strongly "anti-European" on bases which are far from being internationalist! A decisive step in this direction has thus been played by their active participation in international campaigns against capitalist globalisation

and their direct contacts with the organizations and militants of other European countries.

After the demonstrations at Genoa, the influence of this movement is henceforth significant in all far left currents, even those who had a more or less negative approach on this question in the past.

Thus, the discussions and publications after Genoa have been revealing. Similar experiences of recomposition of the far left in other European countries like France, Britain or Portugal have had a great impact in discussions. Even the trade union networks and the youth in the KKE are having these kind of discussions.

It would obviously be desirable if the militants of Euro-communist origin understood the urgency of constructing far left political unity on a basis of class independence!

Unhappily, the regroupment of the "Space" type under the hegemony of Synaspismos plunges the militants and groups participating in this schema in an abstract but profound desire to unify the left, but not in a direction favourable to the interests of the working class! Worse still, the "Space" political project excludes in the long term not only the majority of the far left but also the majority of the Greek left overall.

## Direction

For us there is no doubt that the Initiative, even if currently less developed than the "Space", goes in the direction of the recomposition of the far left and should be supported by all the tendencies who identify with revolutionary Marxism. A more intense participation of militants from the revolutionary Marxist tradition inside the Initiative will enrich discussion and reinforce internal democracy.

We also consider that the campaigns of the far left like the recent and massive anti-racist festivals and the Greek Committee for Genoa should be open to the participation of the reformist organizations and parties (and of course Synaspismos).

This is moreover a traditionally difficult question which still provokes frictions and shouting matches on the Greek far left. To transcend all this and go forward the theoretical and practical contribution of Marxist militants and revolutionary organizations will be a decisive factor.

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[1] See Georges Mitralias, IV 332, June 2001, "[The space of left dialogue and common action](#)". Some formulations contained in this article should be corrected. Thus, it is not true that "Greek comrades of the Fourth International have played a key role in the preparation of the Space" and in the publication of the revue Manifesto as the article says, even if some activists close to the OKDE have indeed participated in the 'Space' and the production of Manifesto.

[2] The imperialist war brought contradictions in the "Space" to the surface much more quickly than envisaged in this article, written in early September. Differences appeared inside Synaspismos, paralyzing it at least initially: one of its currents wished to join the "anti-terrorist" camp, in order to be modern, while the other wished to centre the intervention of the party against the war on formulations referring to "international law" and "international institutions". Left groups, notably the DEA, Diktyo and the Manifesto editorial board have launched, with the OKDE, the antiwar movement, organizing the first central rally in Athens. It seems that the majority of Synaspismos is gradually taking its distance from the most right wing and pro-imperialist tendencies inside it, but it missed the first big demonstrations and it initially manipulated the rubric of "Space", leading to a flood of protests from the other components. After this setback, nobody knows if the "Space" will one day reappear publicly.