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Greece

**“The debt is a key class issue
in the current situation. It lies
at the heart of the question:
which class pays for the
crisis?”**

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- Debate - Perspectives in Greece -

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What was primarily expressed in the vote on 25 January was massive anger and hatred about the previous government of New Democracy (ND, the traditional right party) and PASOK (the fully bourgeoisified socialdemocratic party). These two parties have been the main actors of the violent attack which the working class and the people in Greece have suffered for 5 years. Their government was identified with ever harder austerity, authoritarianism, arduous repression of the workers' and students' movement, layoffs and dismantling of any kind of welfare. Wrath against that government was a perfectly justified and predictable mass sentiment. It was a perplexed sentiment, though, as at this specific conjuncture it took the form of relatively passive electoral expectation rather than active militant action. One cannot understand the roots of this attitude of the people without a balance sheet of the workers' movement since 2010.

Since the beginning of the IMF program in May 2010 the country has undergone a period of immensely accentuated class struggle. Nearly 3 dozens of general strikes, massive workers' demonstrations, the so-called indignados movement, occupation of public buildings (Townhalls, Ministry headquarters etc), prolonged strikes in various sectors (public transport workers, steel workers, workers in the universities, women cleaners etc), antifascist assemblies, even certain self-managements experiments (the VIOME factory, the ERT national tv and radio company) – all these were different interwoven aspects of a rigorous and multiple movement. This movement challenged the bourgeois class and provoked a prolonged political crisis, which is actually still underway. However, it has suffered a visible setback since February 2012, despite some very important ongoing struggles afterwards. The reasons have been both objective and subjective: frustration because of the incapability to effectively block the austerity measures in the short term, despite all heroic struggles – but also the role of the leaderships, both unionist and political, who steadily advocated a merely electoral perspective for the movement.

In 2011 a considerable part of the working class were seriously questioning themselves about the way to organize society: how can we get rid of the debt, what power if not the existing parliament, what system if not this rotten one? However, at the critical point the leaderships of the big left parties, certainly SYRIZA but also the CP in its own way, what nothing else to propose but elections. The meaning was: the relation of forces is currently overwhelming, so wait for the elections to get rid of austerity by voting. This expectation was the concrete content of the election in January. It has been the result of the previous rise of the workers' movement and of its limits at the same time.

Political definition of the government Syriza-Anel

This is actually the key question today. The so much praised “government of the left” is not actually a left government, although its main actor is SYRIZA, a left socialdemocratized party. Even more, it is by no means a “workers' government”. If we had to make a definition, the most appropriate would be a “class collaboration government”, both in terms of its composition and in terms of its program. Tsipras himself has described it as a “national salvation government”. This concept explains why SYRIZA, after their victory, proposed and elected Prokopis Pavlopoulos to be the new President of the Republic. Pavlopoulos is an active ND cadre who, as the then Minister of Internal Affairs, has been the man in charge to repress the December 2008 riot.

The government of Tsipras actually consists of cadres coming from the full social spectrum. It combines older militants of the left, new cadres of the apparatus SYRIZA, left intellectuals, modern mainstream economists,

technocrats and contractors, people from the world of business, bureaucrats previously linked to Simitis and Papandreou (former presidents of PASOK) governments.

The determining factor, however, is not mainly the social composition of the government, but the integration of various social-democrats and, above all, of the nationalist bourgeois party of ANEL (Independent Greeks). Since 2012, SYRIZA and ANEL have been moving in an aligning track in the name of the anti-Memorandum struggle. Especially after the Tsipras-Kammenos official agreement on the issue of Cyprus in spring 2013, their future governmental collaboration has been a common secret. Contrary to a common argument used by its uncritical supporters worldwide, SYRIZA did have an alternative. They could have formed a minority government and claim a vote of confidence from the Parliament, which would be easy to gain. Anyway, accusing the CP or even ANTARSYA of “forcing” SYRIZA to a coalition with ANEL is highly hypocritical. SYRIZA had come to an agreement with ANEL before addressing to anyone else.

SYRIZA's supporters would claim that these alliances are not determining, however this is not true. The Ministry of Economics is in the hands of Yanis Varoufakis, a Keynesian academic economist closely related with Galbraith Junior. Varoufakis has never been a militant of the left. And it is even more telling that none of the two armed state forces are controlled by SYRIZA: the Armed Forces have been assigned to Kammenos, the head of the right nationalist ANEL, and the Police is offered to the social-democrat Panousis, who has been notorious for his authoritarian positions as a university teacher.

In terms of its program, the government advocates a form of class compromise that seeks to partially and temporarily stop the offensive against the working class, but not to reverse it. They propose a mode of capitalist management which aspires to include certain concessions to the working class, without, however, being willing neither to break with any bourgeois institution nor to challenge the right to capitalist property. They promise a campaign of humanitarian aid to the poorest, but it is absolutely unknown where they can find the money for it, since their plan to utilize funds originally meant to safeguard banks has been already utterly rejected by the EU. They promise to re-hire certain categories of struggling fired workers (the women cleaners in the Ministry of Economics, the ERT workers etc), but at the same time they restrict new recruitments to the public sector to the very number predetermined by the ND-PASOK national budget, which means that the number of vacancies occupied by these categories will be subtracted from other sectors. They have already rejected any kind of nationalization and, despite refusing to privatize electricity, they are willing to negotiate other major privatizations. They have promised a modest raise of the minimum salary up to 751 euro, but they have already announced that this measure must be postponed for at least 2 years, according to the rate of economic growth. In short, any concession that SYRIZA promise is in fact accountable to the viability and the development of the national capitalist economy, not to the workers' rights.

The governmental declarations move in a constant zig-zag. What exactly can be achieved is not easy to predict, as it depends above all on the combativeness of working people. We don't underestimate any possible democratic conquest, on the contrary we seek to use it to raise the self-confidence of the masses. But we can have no trust to the government.

The agreement between the government and the Eurogroup

Undoubtedly the agreement has been a clear and obvious retreat. The government has abandoned even the modest commitments that gave them the victory in January. They have accepted to prolong the restructuring program, to fully and timely pay off the public debt, to retain the control of the so-called troika (IMF, ECT, EU). The government has tried to present it as a victory, because we have avoided bankruptcy. But this has been the constant excuse of all the governments that have applied austerity since the beginning of the crisis. Enthusiastic supporters of SYRIZA,

unfortunately including a part of the international revolutionary left, have tried to justify the agreement in the name of some abstract flexible tactic to gain time. But I can not see, nor can they indicate, what space for manoeuvres the terms leave. It is hard to believe there is any kind of intelligent plan behind the government's negotiations. In fact, something completely different than plans, be they good or bad, is at stake: a process of further incorporation of SYRIZA into capitalist management.

There is no need to speak about betrayal. I was not convinced by SYRIZA's promises before the election, anyway. But the key question is not a matter of good or bad intentions, it is a matter of political strategy and orientation. There is no common good for workers and capitalists, there is no way out of the crisis in favour of both. It is therefore an illusion to expect a way out through negotiations and not rupture with the bourgeois and imperialist institutions, and this illusion remains all the same whether intentions are good or not. SYRIZA is to be blamed for spreading massively this illusion. Revolutionary communists have to confront this illusion in practice, by offering a concrete alternative.

What alternative to the blackmail of the Troika?

There is indeed an alternative, even if for the time being SYRIZA and their political orientation are clearly hegemonic among the ranks of the left. In order to form this alternative, one has to start from the opposite end: instead of the viability and competitiveness of the "greek economy" in abstract (which, in particular, means viability and competitiveness of greek capitalism), the start point should be the needs of the working class and of the deprived and oppressed social strata. An up-to-date transitional program is needed. Raise in salaries and wages regardless the "realism" of the markets - public investments under workers' control and reduction of the hours of work in order to confront massive unemployment - collective contracts with real workers' rights - legalization and full rights of all immigrant workers - free education and health care for all the people etc. These conquests need material sources, money, which can't depend on EU or IMF funds, as it has been already obvious that there is no chance for any substantial negotiation in that framework. They demand a radical and abrupt redistribution of wealth. In order to achieve that, to repel tax evasion of the rich, as SYRIZA propose, is not enough, although it would have been positive. What is needed is nationalization of the key sectors of the economy, without any confiscation to private capitalists, and under the control of workers and the people themselves, so that they can indeed function in favour of their own needs - and the cancellation of the debt, as the working class can't and shouldn't pay it off. It is clear that such radical changes cannot be tolerated in the EU, so rupture is necessary, along with internationalist work for a new kind of collaboration of the peoples against their bosses. This alternative may sound utopian, but why is it more utopian than trying to reconcile the wolf with the sheep?

After the agreement with the Troika, critical voices appeared inside Syriza

There are critical voices within SYRIZA, and more such voices have to be expected in the march of the government towards its further adaptation to the system and to austerity, as well. Revolutionary currents will have to work on creating paths to approach, collaborate with and attract such militants to their ranks. However, the internal opposition within SYRIZA is heterogeneous and has no concrete plan to challenge the policy determined by the leadership of Tsipras. None of the deputies voted against Pavlopoulos for President. Although a considerable part of the Central Committee disapproved the specific agreement with the Eurogroup, it is more than doubted that they would also vote against it in the Parliament. In fact, the inner opposition of SYRIZA has not managed to block even a single capitulation during the process of socialdemocratization of SYRIZA. My estimation is that the route of SYRIZA is irreversible. Neither it seems that anticapitalist currents who work inside SYRIZA can profit and grow, in the contrary the centripetal force applied by the leadership seems overwhelming. Instead of being able to mobilize broader layers

of SYRIZA members, the Left Platform of SYRIZA is forced to restrain its own public activities in the name of discipline—for example, they would not join the demonstrations organized against the agreement with the Eurogroup. The blackmail that any criticism weakens the government and objectively favours ND seems omnipotent, not only among members, but also (actually, even more) among voters. In my opinion, therefore, participation in SYRIZA is a totally mistaken choice for anticapitalist and revolutionary organizations.

The class struggle today in Greece and the relationship of the government with the unions

After the election, there were signs of a possible rise of the mass movement. SYRIZA's victory has brought in a climate of optimism and a sentiment of “national dignity” against the lenders. Before the negotiations began, quite massive gatherings were organized in Syntagma Square in Athens and in many other cities. These mobilizations were contradictory regarding their demands: there were sectors that openly supported the government against “the Germans” in the upcoming negotiation, in line with the nationalist rhetoric of SYRIZA and ANELÅ—and there were others who denounced any negotiation and asked for the unilateral cancellation of the debt. ANTARSYA, the anticapitalist left coalition, chose to intervene in these gatherings under our own banners and slogans, as a left and workers' opposition.

All these mobilizations immediately stopped after the agreement with the Eurogroup and the concomitant confusion and disappointment. For the time being, the workers' movement seems stagnant.

It has to be noted that SYRIZA never really tried to mobilize the masses, even to support their own government. This logic is alien to them. The case of ERT has been a very telling example. ANTARSYA militants in the union proposed to re-occupy the former headquarters of the company the very first day after the election. Despite SYRIZA has promised to revive the company and re-hire workers, its unionists voted against the proposal, because this would look like a blackmail to the government. The Communist Party did the same.

In fact, the leadership of SYRIZA has always seen the mass movement as a supplement to their way towards the government. In full contrast with the PASOK government back in the 1980's, who were able to effectively control the workers' movement, SYRIZA has a relatively small implementation in the unions. The big support they enjoy in the vote corresponds to a very modest influence in the big workers' federations and confederations. The Communist Party is clearly stronger there, and the extra-parliamentary left has a comparable influence. For example, in the Board of the General Confederation of Workers in the Public Sector, which is actually the most important workers' union in Greece, ANTARSYA holds 2 out of the 17 seats, whereas SYRIZA holds 3 (in Greece there are no separated workers' unions for each political party and all currents intervene in the same unions through different platforms). Among university students the far left has more than double the strength of SYRIZA, and the CP even more. Of course this can change in the future, but in this case SYRIZA will have attracted people (and bureaucrats) for being the government and not due to their militant activity.

Anyway, the idea that there is no life outside SYRIZA is absolutely distorted. The working class voted for SYRIZA, but they don't side with SYRIZA in their everyday activity. This is a myth. Being independent from SYRIZA is not a sectarian obsession, it is a choice based on the material ground of the class struggle.

The formation of Antarsya and its internal tendencies

Although not obvious in the national election, there is an actual anticapitalist and revolutionary current in the Greek society and among the working class. The stronghold and the most successful experience of this current have been a series of anticapitalist collectives or platforms in various sectors, unions, workplaces and universities. Having a history of more than 20 years, these collectives have managed to lead several important struggles. They work on an autonomous and federal basis, which means that each collective takes their own decisions by means of direct democracy, although there is a clear political influence by certain revolutionary or/and far left groups.

ANTARSYA came out of the maturation of this current and it has brought together the majority of it. The coalition was formed a few months after the December 2008 riot, when the far left was faced with the need to centrally combine its forces so as to be able to have a decisive impact in the class struggle. It numbers nearly 3000 members, mostly youth.

ANTARSYA is not an organization or party, it is an anticapitalist front consisting of 7 different organizations and several independent militants. Its function is based on the principle "one member, one vote". There are about 80 local branches, who decide their local activity in general assemblies. The leading bodies are elected in the national conference.

The main issue of the debate within ANTARSYA is about alliances. Nobody advocates an alliance with SYRIZA, however there is a wing who supports the formation of a broader front, on a more minimum programmatic base, mostly against the EU. The core of this wing consists of two post-eurocommunist organizations of maoist influence. A left wing supports full political and organizational independence of all kinds of reformism (including radical anti-EU popular front reformism), while willing to cooperate with any workers' current on certain common actions. This wing is mostly trotskyist, consisting of the IST section (SEK) and the USFI section (ourselves, OKDE-Spartakos), despite some important differences between those two organizations. Finally, there is a centre formed around the biggest organization of ANTARSYA, NAR, which has been a left split of the CP in the late 1980's, in reaction to the CP's short-lived participation in two bourgeois governments. However, those 3 wings are not stable and may reshape as very important issues demand clear answers.

The need for an international campaign in solidarity with the Greek people and towards the cancellation of the debt

The debt is a key class issue in the current situation. It lies at the heart of the question: which class pays for the crisis. The working class must refuse to pay it off – this is actually a precondition for its very survival. It is also true that international class solidarity is essential for this political task to be achieved. Besides, Greece is not at all the only country where the workers and people are over-exploited, massively deprived of their livings and violently oppressed in the name of the debt. A militant international campaign, which would not be just an international board of economists and specialists, is definitely a good idea. The concrete terms and ways to build it is something to discuss in the very near future.

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