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Greece

The “Movement of the Squares” and the perspectives it creates

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One year after the imposition of the Memorandum and the antilabor and antisocial measures it brought in its wake, the situation of the Greek economy, even under capitalist criteria, has not only not improved but instead significantly worsened. Salaries have decreased, provoking a generalized crisis in the market. At the same time the public debt, which served as a pretext for taking these measures, has increased, whereas the state's income is far below the nominal expectations.

Since the 5th of May 2010 several labor struggles have taken place, but without significant results. In parallel to these a large number of social movements have developed, such as the hunger strike of 300 immigrants demanding their legalization, the struggle of the people in the district of Keratea against the creation of a garbage burial site in their neighborhood, which have achieved some victories as well as others, such as the movement “I won't pay” which is still developing against the rise in prices of practically all social services.

When the government appeared after a year of violent austerity and shamelessly declared that the previous measures had not given the expected results and that new ones had to be taken, the social rage burst out and thousands of people, seeing on the one hand what was expected from them but also the incapacity (or rather unwillingness) of the trade union leadership to stop these measures, spontaneously occupied Syntagma square, the central square of Athens.

The Syntagma square movement creates new perspectives for class struggle. Despite its contradictions and important weaknesses, it is a development that in principle brings hope. At a practical level, it was inspired by the Arab rebellions that largely utilized current technologies to coordinate themselves (Internet, mobile phones etc). The Arab movement managed to traverse the national borders and “invade” Europe, much like European capitalists feared. The Spanish State being the first country to enter the game, other metropolitan capitals followed like Paris, Rome, Lisbon and, of course, Athens. This movement has of course often important weaknesses: most of its participants often have a low level of political consciousness (at least in its most massive manifestations) and it lacks a clear political perspective. However, it is extremely massive, more than 100.000 people participated in its meeting of 5 June in Athens as well as important meetings in other Greek cities. Although it remains particularly blurry and fluid, it starts from a clear demand: the abrogation of the Memorandum as well as the departure of those who brought it with them.

On the other hand, we should of course not overestimate its spontaneous and self-organized character. It does not yet possess features of a genuine revolt, but it is clear that if the idea of a blocking of the parliament on the day when the new Memorandum will be voted comes to fruition, that day will certainly bring in mind a true revolt especially since this day is combined with a general strike. On the one hand, we cannot identify this movement with a new political subject that can replace the centrality of the labor movement. It is, nonetheless, a field of interaction among the avant-garde of the movement and the masses of the oppressed. It provides the oppressed with experience of collective organization (especially social groups that have little chances of encountering such experiences) as well as confidence if it achieves some concrete victory. It is possible that through this movement several new militants will join the ranks of the left and anticapitalist ideas.

As a first step, it is important to try and pin down the social composition of the “indignant” movement, so as to estimate the limits and the goals of our own intervention in it:

– unemployed or precarious workers, a great part of which have essentially no experience of collective organization

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and action neither within the traditional trade unions nor within the political organizations of the working class.

– Small bourgeois that see their level of life being crushed. Occasionally these people identify their interests as opposing those of the lower classes. It is crucial for us to manage and demonstrate that their interests coincide with those of the labor class and not the ones of the capitalists and forge an alliance among the most low-level small bourgeois and the workers.

– Miscellaneous “patriotic” groups.

– Disappointed voters of the two large parties, notably voters of the right-wing.

– The left-wing (apart from the Communist Party of Greece, with participation/intervention details varying among each organization) which, especially after the first days, plays a central role in the people's general assembly taking place every evening at Syntagma square and the several working groups. There is always the danger of turning the assembly into an internal battle of the left-wing organizations. Fortunately, this is not the case for the moment. A significant portion of the autonomous/anarchist collectives is absent and even denounces the whole process, whereas another part is participating actively, presenting more or less the same limitations as most of the left-wing organizations.

It is also crucial to try and codify some basic political characteristics of this movement in order to analyze it in depth and determine our own standpoint in its framework:

– It is opposed to all political parties and to anything organized, although we should note that the initial opposition to trade-unions and strikers has decreased, which is actually one of the major successes of the left-wing's intervention. This standpoint can be partly inscribed within a more general framework due to the incapacity of traditional trade-unions to persuade that determination and struggle are needed: the trade-union leadership is extremely bureaucratized, they have sold out essentially all labor struggles since quite some time, whereas some sectors seem hesitating to mobilize at all. Furthermore, the left has proven incapable of proposing an alternative social project and some perspective in some convincing manner. Despite all this, the clear anti-organization ambiance in this movement should be interpreted as one of its clearly conservative reflexes. At the same time its generalized anti-parliamentarianism although justified, if not supplemented by other political features can lead to reactionary proposals (government of technocrats, strong leaders that are not limited by corrupt MPs).

– It has a highly contradictory character, which is of course in direct relation to its massive nature. This feature will most certainly lead to both ideological and political clashes within the movement.

– It reveals an ambiance of national unity. Consciously or not, non-negligible parts of this movement propose national unity and a government of technocrats that will only act “for the good of the country” as a response to the official sell-out politicians.

– It has introduced highly innovative practices and forms of organization such as a popular general assembly of the movement as well as working groups for discussion and action on specific issues (employment/unemployment, economy, education etc) but also forms of collective handling of space and life (collective nutrition, medical care, cleaning etc).

– Finally, there is some discontinuity among local popular assemblies in which the left-wing and anarchists are more hegemonic and the general assembly at Syntagma square. In fact, some anarchist groups only intervene in local

assemblies.

It is clear that the everyday concentration of people at Syntagma square creates a promising field for anticapitalist and revolutionary ideas. This does not mean that the consciousness of those who take an active part in the movement will be deterministically led towards the left. The anticapitalist left intervention should aim at proposing our ideas to the people, either through the assemblies or during in-person discussions and, given our limitations, primarily aim at those who are apt to be persuaded such as the unemployed, precarious workers or the youth. In order to prevent the far-right from profiting from the generalized indignation and covering the “empty political space” we must rate as priorities, among others, to break the spirit of national unity and consensus as well as to fight against all patriotic and racist reflexes.

The great challenge for us is the unification of this movement with the labor struggles. The beginning was done during the strike of 04/06/2011 when the demonstration of the trade-unions ended at Syntagma square. This must be the case during the next general strike, where trade-unions and the indignant people of Syntagma square must be united and fighting together. This, of course, introduces another essential point of intervention, namely the need to popularize the need for class unity and independence. We must say that the blame is not to be put upon workers enjoying a decent salary, immigrant workers, the public sector etc. We must fight against the separation of workers into, for instance, Greeks and immigrants or public and private sector ones at the same time when the government is playing this exact card, finding an echo into non-negligible parts of the Greek society. Pointing out the necessity for international solidarity and coordination of the struggles (at least throughout Europe) is perhaps a little easier (but crucial), since it becomes increasingly apparent that all people face essentially the same problems (especially in countries under IMF supervision – Ireland, Portugal and Greece – or are menaced by such a perspective – Spanish State).

At the same time, it is important to spread the practice of popular assemblies into neighborhoods and link these to the central one which should remain in Syntagma square. Such smaller-scale cells can be maintained more easily after a potential retreat of the movement (a possibility that we should not ignore) but also favor the organization both at a local level and at the level of workspace.

At the level of immediate or transitional demands it is important to choose those ones that can be widely understood today and constitute a primary unified direction for the movement of the Square, such as:

- Overthrowing of the Memorandum, its measures and the government.

- Renewable general strike and blocking of production (strikes, blocking streets, building occupations and so on).

- Refuse to pay off the debt and erase it.

The question of power and of an alternative social and political system is no longer only put as an objective necessity but also in terms of a generalized question shared by many people. We must discuss in simple terms some basic features of an alternative (communist) society and of a system of power based on assemblies. Even if the most urgent for the moment is to achieve even a single concrete victory that will give confidence to the worker's class and the oppressed, we cannot evade giving some answer to the question “and then, what?”. It is a recurring question both in small-scale discussions but also - although in an elementary form - in the popular assemblies of Syntagma square. Side-by-side to the immediate duty of mobilizing for our fundamental rights, it is important to try and gain an audience for the fundamental revolutionary and communist ideas.

Athens, June 2011