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Greek elections

The pendulum

- Debate - Perspectives in Greece -

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1. It is generally true that there is some delay between the real, active class struggle and elections. However, the recent elections in Greece show a picture from the future: a forthcoming frontal collision of two socio-political camps. The left and the far right. This is not only about the rise of the Golden Dawn neonazi party, but also about the "non-economical" part of the Independent Greeks' program (a split from New Democracy that states it is against the memorandum and accepts the economic program of SYRIZA) as well as the rightward turn of New Democracy (ND, the Christian-Democrats). For working people, the period to come can be summarized by the formula: great opportunities, great dangers.

2. In this confrontation, the left has now a political lead due to the rise of SYRIZA, but also to the weight of the Communist Party, that despite its inability to profit from the biggest leftward dynamics of the last 30 years, remains a party with remarkable influence in the working class and, what's more important, with a large organized membership. Without this membership it would have suffered even more from the trend towards SYRIZA. However the left's lead, even if historically amazing, is very fragile. The electoral rise of SYRIZA is out of proportion to the mediocre rise of its membership. It principally reflects a collective mood for diminishing the traditional dominance of the two parties (ND and PASOK). This phenomenon is not qualitatively different from the takeoff of the Democratic Left (DIMAR) of Kouvelis in the polls in February. It is, in brief, a surprise.

3. This does not mean that the success of SYRIZA is welcomed by the bourgeois class. No, it is a defeat for them. The bourgeoisie is in a real political impasse. Firstly, it is fragmented by different strategic plans which correspond to opposing factions of capital. This is why Samaras' main struggle after the elections has been to reunify a "center-right pro-European front", with some but still not satisfactory results (as far as he is concerned). Secondly, it sees its hegemony fading away. They are not convincing. However, what is different particularly about the last (May 6th) elections is that they failed to persuade people, not only because their political blackmail didn't work, but also because the fundamental politico-economic link with workers and especially with the middle class, that informal "contract with the people" which used to renew periodically, has deeply cracked. The complex of small private property and individual connection with power through the mediation of "politicians", in a few words the Greek mechanism of a conscience buyout, is not working. Maybe this arm is not yet cut out, but it has gangrene and it may be definitely cut. This creates brand new potential to overthrow the bourgeois power.

4. The bourgeois class has two choices, both difficult. The first one is to accept a temporary compromise and maybe even let the left expose itself by managing the system. However, this entails the danger that workers' self-confidence and combativeness will rise in the short-term. The second choice is some type of savage bourgeois bonapartism - if workers can't behave themselves by (relatively) good means, they will do so by bad means. Unfortunately, neither fascism nor a dictatorship are eventualities to exclude in the visible future. Nevertheless, they also mean serious trouble for the bourgeoisie itself. Besides, they are not operationally prepared for something like that. Consequently, their first choice is a comeback to normality by means of class collaboration.

5. But the organizations of the working class themselves are not more prepared for something radically different. The electoral rise of the left and the peaks of the mass movement are not synchronized. The post-electoral leading role of the reformist left coincides with a pause of the movement. Consequently, we can't count on an immediate support or pressure by fresh massive assemblies, strikes, demonstrations etc. Right at the time when the left has the objective power - bigger than ever - to blackmail the political power of Capital, the working class is not questioning directly its economic power. Workers don't yet see the left as the political branch or their own class struggle, but as a body on which they "invest" their hopes. "Tsipras, so that something may change". With regard to the function of social

consciousness, this is unfortunately not so different from: "Golden Dawn, so that some asses may be kicked in the Parliament".

6. A parenthesis: I can accept that some people didn't know what Golden Dawn is and this is why they voted for it. But unfortunately the problem is that most of them knew very well what Golden Dawn is and this is why they voted for it. Indifference is not an excuse, as it is in itself an ingredient of fascism. Misunderstanding or deception, "false consciousness" of reality is not the principal characteristic of this phenomenon, as it is not the principal characteristic of political phenomena in general, because "false consciousness" is an inseparable material ingredient of reality itself. Material relations of the capitalist epoch only are what they are in combination with the forms in which they are reflected in the consciousness of the period, and they could not subsist in reality without these forms of consciousness, says Karl Korsch. Here reality and consciousness coincide, which means that confronting fascism is a much more complex problem than just informing people about neonazi's crimes.

7. The popularity of parliamentarism is sinking, if I may borrow a term from pollsters. It is telling that in the most crucial elections of the last three decades participation failed to grow significantly. It is also notable that polls after the election show that a big majority of what is metaphysically called "public opinion" didn't want a new round of elections, but preferred an agreement for a coalition government to be reached. Obviously this could not happen without those parties who were so angrily punished in the ballot! There is one more paradox: just after the elections many people wished to see SYRIZA be the first party, which actually happened in some opinion polls, but at the same time nobody was in a hurry to see what they wanted to see - they didn't want a new round of elections. This means that actually few hopes are invested in elections. Indifference or hatred against parliamentarism, however, has not necessarily the progressive features that anarchists would hope. The problem about popular disappointment in parliamentary democracy is that it is not only disappointment with "parliamentary", but also with "democracy". As long as there are not the structures of self-management which would link anti-parliamentarism to revolutionary hope, fascism will be linking them to "petit-bourgeois despair", as Trotsky says. Stohos, a fascist newspaper, wrote it in its front page without any self-censorship: the solution "won't come from elections, but from the Army General Headquarters".

8. In this tug of war it is realistic that a government of the left or with the participation of the left may play some role. The second case, a classic class collaboration government, would be so obviously disastrous that it is a waste of time to argue about. We just need to remember that SYRIZA is not in principle against such a government, as addressing the right Independent Greeks party before and after the elections proves. Their slogan anyway is "a coalition government with the left forces in its center". But what about a government of the left or, better, the Left? (the capital letter has some meaning, as we will see later). It is clear that the anticipation of the immediate partial (because of course we know that things don't actually change by voting), but still important, victory which a left government headed by SYRIZA would mean is not something we are indifferent about. Above all, it is the lust for a historical revenge against the right. But if you look at this a little more soberly you realize that the consequences of such a government in the project of the proletariat's liberation are not at all certain. In history one can find examples of left governments that were benevolent for the development of revolutionary processes (for example Nicaragua or Chile, despite their limits) and at least as many left governments that served to conciliate or openly repress them (as happened in Germany after WW I and in France and Italy after WW II). A left (reformist) government is a pendulum that, depending on the powers it is subjected to, may lean towards progressive positions or retreat to reactionary ones. The stronger you pull towards your side, the further the pendulum will go towards the opposite one if it escapes your hands. If a left government escapes the hands of those who pull it to the left, then (the so-called) God help us all. The left is Left only in the eyes of those traditionally left-wing, which means that it has that moral and slightly metaphysical weight of the capital L only for them. In case of a left government failure or betrayal, the rest may very well get deeply disappointed and convinced that "they are all the same". And then lucky us, because the only ones that won't be the same will be the mercenary praetorians of the Golden Dawn.

9. A left government is certainly better for the movement than a right government, but this has to be considered on a

historical scale. The maturation of objective and, what's more, of subjective preconditions for a revolution is not accumulative. It is with this criterion that we have to evaluate the perspective of a left government and for the time being this criterion is not predictable with any certainty. It is certain that a SYRIZA government would raise popular self-confidence in the short term. On the other hand, there is not much to be said about SYRIZA's program: it is clearly more conservative and rightward than PASOK's program when it took power for the first time, in 1981. PASOK at least, then, spoke about some serious nationalizations of big enterprises (and initially actually performed some). In SYRIZA they were also speaking about some nationalizations before the 6 May election, but they completely excluded all this stuff from their "emergency plan" and from the conditions they posed to their possible allies in a government. Now they only demand "public control" of those banks which have been already generously financed by the state, but even this seems to be inferior in their agenda than Tsipras's primary commitment, which is to "do whatever possible so that the country remains in the Euro zone". This political commitment seems to be necessary in order to accommodate former members of the bureaucracy of PASOK governments (like Katseli, minister of national economy and later of labour in the memorandum government of Papandreou, or Kotsakas, also a former minister and close partner of Tsohatzopoulos, currently imprisoned for corruption) who have entered or are to enter the ranks of SYRIZA. The present state of the mass movement as well as the continuous need to negotiate with DIMAR and/or PASOK restricts severely any really progressive potential that a government headed by SYRIZA could have. This is why I don't think that our main slogan in the following period should be "a government of the left", although we are not indifferent about such a perspective. Of course it's not up to us (OKDE and ANTARSYA) whether such a government emerges or not. What is up to us is, in case it actually emerges, to pull the pendulum of class struggle to the left, supporting progressive measures, opposing reactionary ones and promoting further workers' demands.

10. It is undoubted that the reorientation of some militants towards a supposed immediate solution by a left government is partly a reflex to the fear and repulsion we all feel about the living dead mummy of fascism. But it is not at all certain, even if it would be comforting, that a left government could be an effective barrier against fascism. Let's keep in mind that in most of the cases in history when fascism prevailed, it has done so just following the defeat or degeneration of left governments or of progressive governments in which the left took part. There is also a recent example in Greece: Kaminis, a left social-democrat and current mayor of Athens, has been supported by a part of the left (in the first or in the second round) so as to restrict the rise of the Golden Dawn, who won 5.3% of the vote by that time (2010). How well did this work? One and a half years later, the neonazis nearly doubled their percentage in Athens.

11. By getting 1.2%, ANTARSYA did not fail in the elections, if you consider that in 2009 parliamentary elections it had gathered 0.36%, which was by that time the all-time best anti-capitalist score. Nevertheless, this result on May the 6th is certainly below the potential in such a period, although pressures we have suffered by the "governmental" vote for SYRIZA may be a logical excuse. In any case it would be wrong to assume that supporting an autonomous candidacy of ANTARSYA was a mistake. There are not essentially different criteria to evaluate that decision after the election than there were before the election, because the purpose of ANTARSYA's candidacy was (or should have been) to build it further, to stabilize its political relations with militants, to propagate its program etc. If we are to make a proper balance sheet we can't speak just about proportions, numbers, rates and percentages, but also about facts that are more crucial with regard to class struggles, for example that during the election campaign we have recruited the chairman of Athens underground's trade union. Besides, the reason we opposed left governmentalism was something deeper than estimating that numbers wouldn't be adequate for a left government to be formed.

12. Let's conclude: the result of the May 6th election is one more trembling in a political seismic sequence. It reveals and it expands the deep rupture which has opened a real revolutionary potential - not sometime in the future, but in this period. The depth of this rupture causes vertigo and fear even to us - myself included. An abyss may hide the best or the worst and to accentuate contradictions up to the boiling point has always been a dangerous project. Much more dangerous than the smooth "progressive" solution of a left government. But if we really believe that revolution is still today a real possibility, first of all we must take the risk to accentuate social and political contradictions.

Let's start numbering from scratch, going back to the pendulum:

1. The conflict between the left and the right corresponds in the final analysis to the conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie. "In the final analysis" means "not always directly or visibly". What we (OKDE, ANTARSYA, revolutionary communists) should do is bring this connection to the forefront. This means: immediately back on the streets for what we already know (strikes, occupations etc) but also for political demonstrations - against class collaboration governments, for an immediate rejection of the memorandum and cancellation of the public debt or under the banner of any other political demand needed. This should be our role before the election as well as after it, not fishing for votes.

2. Class unity among immigrant and Greek workers is a top priority, which SYRIZA is now setting aside so as not to frighten voters. It is indicative that the reaction of the mayor of Patras to the recent racist pogrom against immigrants was to ask for more police patrols against illegal immigrants - the mayor is supported by SYRIZA!). Regarding this, it is not enough (though still useful) to propagandize solidarity. We have to show in practice that Greek and foreign workers interests coincide (despite the fact that the latter are also sometimes oppressed by the former). This means to mobilize that invisible spot in the middle of the working class: immigrants themselves. Their struggles can prove that we all have a common enemy, which is the bosses. At the same time it can improve their rights and ameliorate the conditions of their existence, thus simultaneously weakening intra-class antagonism among workers. This, in practical terms, is to suggest focusing more on immigrants. Besides, they could possibly prove more effective in smashing fascists...

3. ANTARSYA is now big and visible enough to propose a genuine united front of the working class. Genuine, which means with its original political sense, neither like an electoral conglomeration or an attachment to reformism, nor like a coincidental de facto meeting in the struggles. We need to propose a clear, explicit, brief and public agreement for common action, which should include left parties (CPG/KKE, SYRIZA), extra-parliamentary communist organizations, anarchist groups, collectives, trade unions etc. We don't need and we can't have a common program, but we can agree on 5 or 6 points: common self-defense against neonazis and common antifascist action, common organization of strikes, occupation and autogestion/workers' control of closing enterprises, common participation in assemblies or committees in workplaces and neighborhoods, common campaign for international solidarity. Such a proposal is what we urgently need, not a virtually governmental programmatic consensus, which is rather unfeasible and thus just propagandistic, and moreover not necessarily relevant to the united front.

4. The transitional program we describe is a quite sufficient counterweight to reformist projects of the virtually and possibly actually "governing" parliamentary left. However, it is not yet concrete enough. We have to prove that a revolutionary counterproposal could also be applicable in practice. This is an indispensable term in order to convince against "realistic" arguments, which SYRIZA seems already to succumb to, if it is not actively spreading itself - that a unilateral termination of the memorandum would lead to international isolation, that expropriation of banks would provoke partners in the government to withdraw their support. We have to study further examples and historical experiences of revolutionary struggles of the oppressed and the exploited: revolutionary measures in Russia, Cuba or China, autogestion in Algeria and in Latin America etc, even progressive measures applied by Chavez. If anything, so as to depict in our own conscience the real potential of utopia. How can international solidarity practically eliminate pressures inflicted by the international vindictiveness of bourgeois classes? How can we achieve expropriations with no compensation without the universe collapsing? What exactly is workers control and how does it work? This last question in particular is a key in order to conceive what the essential difference between a radical left government and a revolutionary workers' government is.

5. The question of the euro currency and of the EU is now getting really crucial, in its fundamental sense: that a currency, a faceless concept of the market, a mystified and fetishized force is used to terrorize and pose an upper limit to the demands, and thus to the needs, of the oppressed. SYRIZA totally accepts this blackmail, thus letting the bourgeoisie shift the divisions: working class vs capital, left vs right, memorandum vs anti-memorandum, to a

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question of pro-European forces against anti-European ones. "Orientation towards Europe" becomes an oath of allegiance to the system. SYRIZA takes this oath, right at the time when the Euro zone and the euro currency prove to be more than ever a capitalist mechanism for austerity. Our task is not to strive to prove with capitalist political economy criteria that a national currency is better, but to explain and proclaim that it is feasible and, what's more, desirable to unleash this sword over our heads.

6. The pendulum's final point of balance depends on objective conditions, but it is eventually decided by subjective ones. In a quicksand of liquid social consciousness, powerful collective political entities are needed more than ever. I am talking about the so much discussed revolutionary parties. Even if there have been, under specific historical circumstances, victorious revolutions led by parties that were not sufficiently or consciously revolutionary (Cuba, China), no revolutionary situation has ever been resolved in a revolutionary manner in the absence of autonomous workers' political parties to the left that are in contrast to the reformist governmental left. So, such entities are an indispensable condition for a successful revolutionary process. On the other hand, they are also an indispensable condition in order to resist a rapid rightward or an extreme right development if (when) a possible left administration fails. In Greece we estimate that the creation of such a party depends primarily on how the ANTARSYA project develops (as a whole, or more probably, through splits and fusions with other currents). It is thereby crucial that ANTARSYA exists as an autonomous entity. Paradoxically, no matter how much elections have been discredited in the social consciousness, political subjects structure, become themselves, by participating in elections. If you are not there, the mass thinks you don't exist. This is not necessarily good, but it is still true. ANTARSYA managed to evolve from a forum of extra-parliamentary left devotees to a real visible current in the working class not only by playing a leading role in struggles but also by running election campaigns. It is probable that ANTARSYA won't do well in the 17 June election. However, I think that if it doesn't show up autonomously, it will have a problem continuing to exist. What's at stake is not to preserve ANTARSYA's credibility in general, but to preserve the unity of its 3000 or more vanguard militants. Otherwise, we face the danger to let drop what we have accumulated by some years' hard work. Elections may prove to be a bitter task, but we have to undertake it.

7. But there is also one more reason why I am extremely skeptical about a collaboration or a vote "without any illusion" for SYRIZA, though not denying that such a proposal could have a fair reasoning. Deluded or not, all votes in a ballot count the same, which is as one vote. Moreover, it is proven that there are few bigger illusions than thinking you can support a party without any illusions. Because the illusion here regards the influence you suppose you have on a party just because you have proved your credibility by supporting it. I strongly believe that ANTARSYA, despite its bureaucratic mistakes, pressures SYRIZA from the outside much more efficiently than anticapitalist organizations who are "recomposing" or "applying entryism" inside it. What exactly are those organizations determining about Tsipras post-electoral game? PASOK can offer plentiful information from the past of a delusion that has cost trotskyism a lot: the concept that reformism can change its route or at least discredit itself in the eyes of its supporters by the activity of informal revolutionary lobbies who pressure its bureaucratic leadership from the inside. It is a paradox that a current that came to life striving to build really revolutionary parties in the place of the old degenerated ones has often undervalued the importance of autonomous revolutionary parties - I am not talking so much about the program as about the painful task to structure it into a distinguished collective subject.

One might think that this is all nothing but words. But theory, words are all the same a practice, an aspect of reality not less "real" of what we are used to call "material". Let's cite also Marx: they do not "stand outside the world any more than man's brain is outside of him because it is not in his stomach".

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