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Greece

The Third National Conference of Antarsya

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The Third National Conference of the Greek anti-capitalist left, organized three years after the previous one, was a gamble and a challenge, for reasons that were at once fundamental, strategic and organizational.

First the numbers: there were 900 delegates, elected on the basis of one for every three members, which means that Antarsya has almost 3,000 members in its ranks, almost as many as three years ago, and it can be said that at least 2,000 of them are really active members.

The numbers are important because we have to take into account that last summer, after the defeat of Syriza, there was a split in Antarsya, including two constituent organizations (Aran and Aras) which broke from Antarsya and joined with a split-off of Syriza to form Popular Unity (LAE). So we can say that the present conference was held just after a crisis and a defeat, insofar as Antarsya did not attract the left splits from Syriza and further, that it lost forces itself! Despite the losses of last summer, the figures show that a substantial layer of activists from the workers' and social movement is organized in Antarsya. This is apparent also in the latest poll results to be published: Popular Unity, with its former ministers and well-known leaders, is on about 2 per cent, while Antarsya, whose leaders are little known, or even unknown, is on 1.5 per cent. But what is most important is that the framework for discussion and alliance of these activists remains very united and plural, as was demonstrated by the debates of the conference!

The focus of discussion, this time, was not centred on programmatic issues as such (the European Union, the euro, the transitional programme, etc.) but rather on what could be called the question of "alliances", in other words, how to intervene in a working class and a workers' movement that has experienced a splendid defeat of the "soft" (reformist) road in the face of capitalist barbarism, but which has known neither an outflanking movement such as "June 36" nor a comprehensive defeat, something which was demonstrated by, for example, the most recent great mobilization on February 4 - comparable to the mobilizations of 2010-2012 - but also by practical solidarity in favour of refugees.

In the congress, there was a real discussion around this question, although it also came up through various channels, around several themes, mainly those of the organized workers' movement and of addressing the various forces that were breaking from Syriza (but also from the KKE) as well as how to characterize Syriza today.

In trying to summarize the main lines of the responses that were proposed, beyond the nuances and internal differences, one could say that there were three blocs formed within the congress.

One response was formed around the NAR (an old split from the KNE - Greek Communist Youth – which is the main Greek revolutionary group) and the minority of Aran that remained in Antarsya. This component finally had an almost overwhelming majority of delegates (over 60 per cent). Its analysis describes a situation of relative retreat of the working class, with as a perspective the task of trying to revive the workers' movement, including appeals and actions with the aim of immediately outflanking the trade union bureaucracy, considered to be a treacherous apparatus and to be recognized as such by the masses. In this analysis, the question of fronts, including political ones, remains relevant, especially with currents breaking from Syriza, those which refused its capitulation, without drawing clear programmatic conclusions: this involves basically Popular Unity (LAE), which has simply added to Syriza's programme the need for a monetary break (seen, moreover, as something rather to be negotiated). But confusion remains as to the modalities of the necessary address to these currents, to the extent that it presupposes, without admitting it clearly, programmatic adaptation, considered as necessary to the extent that these currents do not necessarily bathe in a clear or consistent anti-capitalism!

A second response was formed around the SEK (the Greek current of the International Socialist Tendency). It was shared by about a quarter of the delegates, with an argument of "workers 'united front', i.e. a systematic address to the union bureaucracies and towards the layers of radicalized militants. This response, as "classic" as it may be in general, is fraught with real problems in the current situation, not to mention a questionable analysis of the SEK on the continuous and constant rise of the working class: in fact, even if it is not theoretically false, it is not easy to consider now as "reformist" a government party like Syriza that is carrying out one of the most violent attacks against the working class. And secondly, the attacks over the last five years against the workers' movement have completely discredited, destabilized and even disorganized the trade union bureaucracy, and even more so the real base of the unions. It is to this extent just an abstract address to the workers' organizations, which if it is not aimed simply at denouncing them, risks at least sowing illusions: this is in any case the criticism of this analysis by its opponents.

The third tendency was formed by the "Initiative for a revolutionary Antarsya" around the OKDE-Spartakos (Greek section of the Fourth International). It was approved by approximately 8 per cent of the delegates. To put it clearly, the Initiative's response was to refuse any unified political approach, except coexistence in the street, and to systematically put forward anti-capitalist solutions. It seems, moreover, that most of the activists of the "Initiative" (except the members of OKDE-Spartakos) rallied around this position of revolutionary retreat precisely as a result of the lesson of the past three years during which Antarsya, as such, has lost a lot of energy by trying to adapt to political "alliances" with "radical" (and not purely anti-capitalist) forces, under the pressure of pessimistic analyses (especially from Aran and Aras, but also from a part of the NAR), according to which the relative position of the working class, of waiting passively, contaminated by parliamentarist illusions in Syriza, required transitional stages, in particular national ones, in the overthrow of capitalism and even of austerity policies. In drawing from the negative balance sheet of this search for programmatic alliances by Antarsya radical lessons of total refusal to collaborate with anyone, the comrades of the "Initiative" are paradoxically aligned on many aspects of the analysis of the first tendency, especially regarding trade union work.

In addition to questions of "alliances" or addresses, there was another issue that sharply divided the congress (two blocs this time) and which may seem organizational but has very political implications: this is the way of taking political decisions and the method of electing leaderships. On the first point, the system of decision-making has not changed and therefore maintains the different levels of "important" decisions that require a two-thirds majority and the others with a simple majority, plus the search for consensus. On the way of electing leaderships, there was no formal change either, but the refusal of proportional representation by the majority of delegates led this time to the exclusion from the leadership, unintentionally, of the third tendency, a situation that Antarsya is trying to correct ... after the event!

This situation provides a simple demonstration of the necessity of democratic procedures, beyond formulas. In addition, it links up with another problem, that of the existence of part of the members who are not organized in any current, and who are obliged by this system of decision-making to ally with the organized currents; a way of functioning that is not very attractive, including at the level of the grassroots organizations of Antarsya. An awareness of this aspect could also help correct the present functioning of the Greek anti-capitalist left.

For what is fundamental is not the organizational questions or even the functioning of the anti-capitalist left. What is fundamental are the tasks and the weight of this organized force to really take forward the working class, and it is in this context that questions of functioning and unitary questions take on their true meaning. We know from experience that in several crucial cases, the activists of the anti-capitalist left have played a role of catalyst. Not only in "small" battles (in a factory, a sector of activity, or on a local level) but also in the central battles, the role of Antarsya has been crucial: for the organization of the struggle against fascism, for solidarity with immigrants and refugees, or in launching the movement for No in the referendum. But we have also seen that neither the weight of the left nor its exemplary actions have been sufficient to prevent demoralization in the face of betrayals or political failures. Because facing us, there is a system, capitalism, whose uneven crisis continues and is combined at its weak link, which in Europe is Greece, with a crisis of war and refugees. Admittedly, lost battles are demoralizing, but they also serve to

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take better account of the challenges and the real difficulties. The anti-capitalist wing of the workers' movement must have a clear vision, but it is not enough to explain it verbally: we must above all translate it into levers for unitary class mobilization to win the widest possible agreement with this understanding. In this country, but also in others, to the extent that the problems and the attacks intertwine, as we see now with the refugees.

Athens, March 15, 2016