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Greece

Left perspectives on the December Revolt

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Nearly four months after the immense youth revolt that followed the killing by a policeman of young Alexis Grigoropoulos, it is indisputable that it has become a reference point not only in Greece, but also at least in Europe, where you can hear for example on French student demonstrations: "Guadeloupe everywhere, a general Greece!". In addition, Greece continues to experience mobilisations which, while certainly less massive, reflect the fact that, in the face of the broadening crisis and the repression which seems the only stable policy of the right, the fires of revolt continue to burn.

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Even if the powerful wave of December did not lead to what was then possible, the overthrow of the right wing government, many things are beginning to profoundly change here, as witnessed by the impressive mobilisations of recent years (port workers, farmers, students, environmental struggles and so on). Without going back on the causes of this unexpected mobilisation, there are many reasons to review rapidly some key points of the period, so as to clarify for the reader some questions which are debated, some of them more outside Greece than in Greece itself. And it certainly seems necessary to us to evoke the development of the Greek anti-capitalist left which, after "December 09" has begun to regroup its forces and discuss programmatic axes.

1- DECEMBER: A MOBILISATION WITHOUT POLITICAL DIRECTION

This is clear: No political force can claim to have led the movement in any way. Activists from the revolutionary left, from Synaspismos, without forgetting the KKE (Greek CP), fairly well implanted in the high schools which, while denouncing the other forces and dividing the mobilisations, could not refuse to mobilise, massively and immediately participated in this movement. What is certain is that the movement, seeking a determined response to the police violence, was influenced, initially massively, by somewhat anarchistic practices, without the groups of this current being able to organise anything concrete in relation to this multiform tendency. On the contrary, it should be recalled that one of the axes of intervention of the anti-capitalist left in the movement was to propose a self organised structuring, of which the difficult establishment of the coordination committees was an element. Nonetheless, the absence of a democratically self-organised structuring at all levels was one of the main, if not the main, weaknesses of the movement.

2- THE QUESTION OF THE JUNCTURE OF THE MOBILISATIONS

In any movement of the breadth of the December revolt, there are crucial moments, which, according to how they pan out, affect the likelihood of a victorious generalisation. The date of December 10, four days after the killing and the immediate extension of the movement to all the regions of Greece, thus became a crucial moment: the trade union movement, with the single confederation the GSEE and the Public Federation ADEDY, had for some weeks called for a one day general strike against the anti-worker policy of the government. In the context opened since

December 6, the stakes became very high for a right hesitating between the strengthening of repression and political disorientation before the breadth of the revolt. The Prime Minister Karamanlis then asked the GSEE to postpone this strike, obviously fearing the juncture of the revolt of youth and angry workers combined (remember that in spring, when the right introduced pension reforms, the reformist PASOK bureaucracy, Synaspismos and KKE succeeded with great effort in preventing the extension of the renewable strike). The president of the GSEE (PASOK has the majority of its leadership) very firmly refused to sacrifice the workers' interests to Karamanlis.... but he transformed the planned demonstration on the streets of Athens to a rally without demonstration at Syntagma square in the centre of the capital. The objective was clear: to prevent a common and determined demonstration of tens of thousands of workers and youth, which could be transformed into an immediate demand for the departure of a government henceforth clearly in the minority (30 to 35% in the polls, if we add the scores of the far right).

It was one of those moments where history can accelerate and the choice was clear: either to maintain the appeal to carry out the planned demonstration, or to align with the trade union bureaucracy rejecting class confrontation with the right and the possibility of a power vacuum which the institutional left did not want. And the choices have been made according to this alternative: on the one hand, a determined demonstration on the planned 2 km route, attracting numerous youth (in particular students), teaching unions, groups of radicalised workers, numerous groups from the anti-capitalist left, and, among them, the KOE, the main group of the revolutionary left in Syriza. On the other, numerous workers who listened to the speeches of the reformist union leadership without demonstrating before dispersing without worrying the government too much. Let's be clear, with regard to the massive participation in the two initiatives and in measuring then the possibilities, it is obvious to many in Greece that the reformist bureaucracy had saved the government on that day and indicated the political framework in which it wished to contain the movement. The demand for the resignation of the government became secondary to slogans, certainly indispensable, on the disarmament of the police and the dissolution of the special corps. And the absence of a living democratic self-organisation prevented a real discussion in the movement on the importance of this political question and on the necessity of the workers' movement taking it up.

3- FIRST EFFECT OF THE MOVEMENT: A GROWING MOBILISATION

Of course even if it hasn't fallen, the right has since December been more discredited. But it keeps its nuisance power, in a situation where the economic crisis is now reflected by thousands of dismissals in February (80,000 jobs lost between September and December 2008) and still darker perspectives. Traumatized by the youth revolt, it seems that at least a part of the right sees the accentuation of the repression as the sole possibility: we saw it in early January, with resumed youth demonstrations attacked by police, and in mid March when the right took up the proposals of the far right against wearers of hoods and anti-police slogans! But also with the recourse to para-state forces against those protesting against the destruction of a green space in a popular neighbourhood, with the throwing of a grenade at a café which was a meeting place of the Network for Political and Social Rights (DIKTYO) and other radical organisations. However, the key issue today for broad mobilisation has been the aggression against an immigrant trade union coordinator, Konstantina Kouneva, a heated defender of rights of cleaning workers. Attacked with vitriol and very seriously wounded, his support was initially limited to the radical left and combative trade unions like his own. But support has spread following several big demonstrations and now even PASOK leader Giorgos Papandreou inveighs against companies who turn workers into slaves. Meanwhile, PASOK and Syriza have proposed Kouneva as a candidate on their respective lists at the European elections. Kouneva, who as a class struggle trade union leader has had to confront the Pasok or Synaspismos union bureaucracy several times, has rejected the proposal. This struggle has a significant impact in a context where racist attacks and propaganda have sharpened (and not just from the neo Nazi 'Golden Dawn' group, Chryssi Avgi, one of whose members has just received a light sentence following his trial for armed attacks against revolutionary activists).

4- SECOND EFFECT OF THE MOVEMENT: POLITICAL RECOMPOSITIONS

Of course, there are premises, with the existence for some years of MERA and ENANTIA, two separate groupings of several groups of the revolutionary left. And the very successful meeting with Alain Krivine in the spring on May 68 saw a fairly broad co-organisation. In addition, many of these groups participated in meetings organised in France for an anti-capitalist left. One can then say that for nearly a year now, things have been moving. But the December revolt allowed the shift to a higher gear: It is now clear that to weigh politically in the struggles and at the national level, the Greek revolutionary left must regroup to launch a credible anti-capitalist left. That is what was set up at the end of January, the idea being to reach agreement on some key programmatic axes, on the basis of activism in the big mobilisations.

It is about building a left rejecting entry into institutional management, which already makes all the difference with PASOK as well as with the KKE and Syriza. If the two latter are capable of a class struggle language (KKE) or acceptable programmatic orientations (Syriza), their practice very often denies it. Many in Greece remember that Synaspismos regrouped in 1989 the two Greek CPs ... to form a government with the right, first against PASOK (July-November 1989) then with the right and PASOK (the so-called ecumenical government of November 1989-April 1990). If the KKE left Synaspismos in 1991, it continues as we saw in December to back the right. Synaspismos inherited from this period of coalition with the right three former ministers of whom two were among the main leaders of Syriza (belonging to two different currents): Fotis Kouvelis, parliamentary spokesperson for Syriza, and Giannis Dragasakis. One could multiply the examples of the enmeshment inside the bourgeois institutions of the KKE and Synaspismos. The young leader of Synaspismos, Alexis Tsipras, is presented by the media as the "Greek Besancenot", although our postman comrade would never cordially fraternise with a right wing minister and one of the country's biggest employers as Tsipras has just done in the context of the beginning of the construction of a new football stadium in the centre of Athens.

Independence in relation to PASOK is obviously a key element: if we cannot at this level reproach the KKE, which denounces the "gang of three" but has in its turn been accused of being allied to the right, we cannot say the same of Synaspismos. Here also we must distinguish proclamations from everyday practice. But first examine a fact which has been little examined in recent months by triumphalist analyses: The percentages given in 2008 in the electoral polls to the Syriza grouping have been in fact, beyond a base of 5 to 7% clearly attributable to Synaspismos (1996: 5.12% for Syn; 2007: 5.04 for the Syriza grouping.), generally variable according to the pressures of the PASOK electorate on the Papandreou leadership. Today when the electoral credibility of PASOK as the way to beat the right has in part been re-established, the percentages give Syriza from 5 to 9% (in a poll on March 20: 5.6% for the parliamentary elections, 7.3% for the Europeans, PASOK being given 33% in the 2 cases), and in 3 polls out of 4, it has fallen behind the KKE.

But this close electoral relationship is reflected in the approach to the "big questions": thus, the journal "Eleftherotypia" noted at the end of February that Papandreou and the president of Syriza, Alavanos, had come together around what should be demanded of the prime minister at the European summit, the measures proposed being classically reformist if not technocratic! Like PASOK it supports the classically reformist parliamentary proposal, for reorganisation of the police put forward by the group Syriza. Let us add that the "renewer" current of Synaspismos leans openly to governmental cooperation with PASOK. This current has just moreover rendered an invaluable service to the government: At the elections for the leadership of the higher education teachers union (POSDEP), it coalesced with the rightist tendencies and PASOK to overthrow the outgoing leadership, close to the majority current of Synaspismos!

Indeed, in a context where university struggles are politically important, the old leadership rejected the "dialogue without preconditions" which the minister for education had just proposed: the new POSDEP leadership is on the verge of accepting, the better to smother rank and file combativeness. But so far as the majority of Synaspismos is concerned, Alavanos, the president of Syriza, has just written to Karamanlis (for the right) and to Papandreou (for PASOK) to propose to them to work for the recomposition of the student union EFEE, fragmented for several years, as if that was not the strict area of the students themselves through their debates and struggles! We will say no more

on this reality which in fact distances Synaspismos and Syriza from a practice or a will for rupture with the bourgeois institutions, but we must obviously state that there are differences (the Synaspismos youth organisation, which has grown, is clearly more to the left) and that it is necessary to lead mobilisations and discuss with Synaspismos and Syriza. We are content to restate here what the Greek section of the Fourth International has said for some year: What is urgent in Greece is to build an independent anti-capitalist left, which could weigh on the developments expected in both Synaspismos and the KKE (sign of the times? The most Stalinist of its deputies was not re-elected at the CC during its congress!) as in PASOK (through its worker militants).

5- A SPACE 100% LEFT: THE NECESSARY REGROUPING OF THE ANTI-CAPITALIST LEFT ADVANCES IN ALL INDEPENDENCE

Following the appeal of January 31 and during the months of February and March there was a whole series of local and sectoral rallies to discuss the idea of a unitary and structured anti-capitalist left. Baptised "anti-capitalist assemblies" they were in fact veritable rank and file meetings of all the organisations who had signed the appeal. Open to various anti-capitalist left activists beyond organised elements, these meetings discussed the possibilities of local construction but also of unitary structuring of the anti-capitalist left at the national level.

It should be said that the ground was not completely virgin, at the level of mobilisations, pre-existing contacts, and even sometimes of informal co-ordinations. But a specifically political discussion, with a precise organisational point, was not part of the habitual practices of most!

The conference of March 22, which crowned this movement, constituted a very significant step forward while also registering limits, insufficiencies, needs and so on. A general political text, as well as a political declaration and central slogans for the period were adopted and the undertaking to advance together in the coming battles (including in the European elections) constituted a new point of departure. A national coordination has been set up, but it should be strengthened to the extent that the local structuring acquires a closer character.

The Left Anti-capitalist Coordination for the Overthrow (of the system), whose name was in part chosen for its initials, Antarsya, which means in Greek "mutiny" or "revolt" or again "take to the maquis" (the "antartes" were the "partisans" of the anti-Nazi resistance), was then launched in the immediate battles of the class struggle, with a common consciousness of the urgency of radical responses faced with the crisis of capitalism and the damage it causes. All the questions could not be answered, like the ideological references, strategy or also organisational questions. But the unitary framework now exists, and some of these questions will find a response with time, experience, debates.

The urgency is to develop an instrument which can weigh decisively on the *résistance* and struggles of the workers, who must face, beyond the repression of the right, divisions and impasses which, under various forms, are those of PASOK, Synaspismos and the KKE. It is vital for the combats of the working class and youth that the anti-capitalist forces, through "Antarsya", propose a response at the level of the social anger, which if it was doubted, has been verified with the very high participation in a one day general strike on April 2nd whose only official perspective was that it be followed in some time by a new 24 hour strike! The hope is that from now on the workers can take their affairs into their own hands, aided by the militant presence of the anti-capitalist left.