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Greece

Greece at war in 2012, as Spain was in 1936 for the people of Europe!

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV446 - March 2012 -

Publication date: Friday 2 March 2012

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This speech by Sonia Mitralia, member of the Greek Committee Against Debt and the Women's Initiative against Debt and Austerity Measures, was delivered at the meeting organised in Marseille on 17 February, by the French campaign for "a citizens' audit of the public debt".

History is moving apace and the cataclysmic events of these last few days in Greece should by now have convinced even the most reluctant among us. For the Europe of today, Greece appears to be playing the same role that Spain did for Europe in 1936! This seemingly bold statement is not the claim of a few romantics. No, it is an observation made by our leaders because those who have been pressuring us daily for almost two years now are the "people at the top" the Merkels and Sarkozys, the IMF and the bankers, the neoliberal response from beyond national borders, those who have elected to transform Greece into a laboratory for their inhuman policies and Greeks into guinea-pigs for their shock therapy.

It is high time for us, "those at the bottom" in Europe, to apply to the letter, what Merkozy and their Troika have been telling us, and to finally act accordingly. Let us accept the challenge and let them know that from now on, and without delay, Greece is going to become a test-case for us as well, for the labour movement, for the social and women's movements, for the peoples and the exploited throughout the whole of Europe! Yes, let us make them understand that we are all Greeks indeed, because we are fully aware that the struggle of the Greek people is our struggle now more than ever. Once they break down their resistance and subjugate the Greek people, it will then be our turn, and the turn of all the other European people, one after the other, to undergo the same treatment...

You might recall that at the very beginning they told us a lot of nonsense such as, "this is a singular case and particularly Greek because the Greeks are lazy, and accustomed to corruption and lies". However, since then, we have learnt that the black hole of debt is not peculiar to Greece, and is not the result of the so-called...hypertrophy of the Greek State, because it is just as much American, French, Italian and Japanese. In short, this debt is typically capitalist and the crisis is quite simply...systemic.

However, let's be wary of using stock expressions and clichés because they are wholly inadequate to describe the reality of the current situation in Greece. Can we still talk about austerity, even draconian measures, when salaries and pensions in Greece are being reduced by 40, 50 or even 60%? When the purchasing power of the vast majority of the population has already been eroded by 50, 60, or even by 70% or more? When the Greek middle class has been ruined and is rapidly slipping into poverty? When new workers earn no more than 417 euros and recent pensioners only 320 euros? Is it simply a question of "rigour" when one in every two young Greeks is unemployed and the unemployment rate now stands at 25%? How can we talk about simple "temporary sacrifices" when malnutrition is widespread among primary school students, and hunger is even beginning to gain ground in the middle-class neighbours of Greek cities? And how can we claim that all this is "necessary to bring order to the Greek finances" when the oppressors themselves admit cynically that the policies they have forcibly imposed on Greece have failed, are only pushing the country deeper into a horrific recession and that the Greek debt can never be reimbursed? So, is it merely sadism on the part of the now unfortunately famous Troika or an open, all-out capitalist war against the working class? The day-to-day reality is forcing us to acknowledge: Yes, we in Greece are witnessing an all-out war by "those at the top" against "those at the bottom", by the very rich against the rest. At the same time, we must not forget - because this is very serious - that we are seeing the return of the worst type of neocolonialism when we see Greece humiliated and practically stripped of its national sovereignty, treated by its so-called ... European partners like a colony, a protectorate under supervision, managed on spot by a petty Gauleiter of Madam Merkel and Mr. Schaeuble...

So, the Greeks, what are they doing? Do not believe what you are being told about the Greeks. Your media is just like ours: the reality that they are depicting is not at all real. In describing the current situation in Greece, they focus on the fact that there is a government of national unity in Athens which has the support of four-fifths of the representatives of the Greek people. So, if we were to believe them, we would conclude that the Greeks are rather masochistic and just love to be ill-treated...

Of course, the reality on the ground is quite different. More than ten general strikes in less than two years, countless clashes and strikes across the entire country, an atmosphere bordering on insurrection over the last few months, the Indignant Movement (Aganaktismeni Greeks) which swept through Greece in three months, very violent clashes with the unbridled forces of repression, Ministers and parliamentarians who, for 10 months now, do not dare to leave their homes because they are jeered or even assaulted by passers-by, a parliament that is increasingly attacked by hundreds of thousands of protestors who will, sooner or later, invade it. That's a brief overview of what has become an almost daily routine in Greece over the many long months.

However, these are but the preliminary warning signs of a massive social upheaval that is on its way. In fact, a closer look would reveal that popular anger has now exceeded historic levels; Greece is like a social volcano waiting to erupt. Moreover, the ever-increasing surveys present the situation quite starkly. Popular support for the so-called National Unity Government is no more than 8% whereas all the parties to the left of the social-democratic PASOK are now earning scores exceeding 50%! Everything is changing at a terrific rate and the Greek political landscape is undergoing unprecedented upheaval because entire sections of this society are seeking radical solutions to the crisis and their swift slide into poverty. I will give you an example that perfectly illustrates this wholly exceptional situation, which is increasingly similar to what took place in a certain country between two wars on our continent. The PASOK which, two years ago, was victorious in the polls with a record score of 45%, now, according to all the surveys, has less than 10% whereas a tiny group of neo-Nazi killers recently polled 3%! Yes, Greek society is already experiencing its own Weimar Republic ...

So, what's to be done? The first thing is to make it abundantly clear that the Greeks must not pay this debt which is strangling them and which is not of their making. Payment of the debt must be suspended immediately. Why? To do what we are obliged to do under international law, the UN, and a number of international conventions that have been signed by our governments : invest the astronomical sums of money currently being used to service this debt, to satisfy the basic needs of the Greek society, for health, education, infrastructure, public services, for the unemployed, starving children, single-parent households, the sick and infirm, and for the women who are now obliged to carry out, free of charge and with their families, all the tasks that were done by the public services before they were dismantled and privatised.

For how long? For as long as it takes to conduct a citizens' audit of the debt to identify the illegitimate part that must be cancelled. And we need to do this while stubbornly refusing to yield to the blackmail of our oppressors who tell us all day long that such a radical policy will automatically lead to Greece exiting the Eurozone and the European Union, and to compulsory national withdrawal...

No, no, no!! We refuse to pay this debt and we intend to stay in the Eurozone. The main reason for this is quite simple: we want to fight alongside you, all together, hand-in-hand with all the peoples and workers on this continent, to demolish this capitalistic Europe of the Merkels and Sarkozys. This is because we want to create and broaden what we call the "systemic crisis" of this anti-democratic and anti-social European Union of the rich. So, from now on, there is only one option, the only one that is realistic and feasible: for all the oppressed classes in Europe to come together and fight. Comrades, now more than ever, we need to find strength in unity. Let us unite because together we can change this world which is in the process of deteriorating. Let's come together before it's too late... And remember: If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

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Translation from French: Angela Mitchell.