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Our line on Greece without prism or omission

- Fourth International resolutions - World Congresses - 17th World Congress - 2018 - 17th World Congress discussion -

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The text by Manos ("[Greece, a story without the distorting prism of Syriza](#)") follows a clear thesis:

Syriza's experience reflects the impasse of "broad parties", "anti-austerity governments" and the failure of anti-capitalist left-wing movements accused of supporting Tsipras and Syriza, like the Fourth International leadership.

The advantage of Manos' text is that it deals directly with the debate that existed within the revolutionary left concerning Greece and defends the orientations of the OKDE Spartakos by polemicising against that of the FI leadership without falling too far into the caricatures that we experience elsewhere. This allows a concrete debate without having to polemicise against floods of false information and calumny. But at the same time Manos mixes together individual positions and collective positions, and those of various currents with those of the FI.

For our part, we will discuss what concerns us, that is to say the orientations elaborated within the bodies of the FI and the published texts and resolutions of our bodies, in particular from spring 2012, and especially from January to September 2015, from the election of Syriza to the day after Tsipras' acceptance of the 3rd memorandum.

We followed a political line, not hopes, fears or disappointments, a line shared by the vast majority of sections of the International. We have had many disagreements with the OKDE comrades since the beginning of this experiment, but nevertheless shared many common analyses:

We will try to take the various questions in order, taking up the same ones as those raised by Manos.

Was Syriza, especially in 2012, an expression of the rise of the mass movement?

Syriza is the product of the regroupment of Synaspismos (Eurocommunist organization resulting from successive splits of the communist movement) and groups of the far left. Although the vast majority of the trade union movement was in 2012 organized by PASOK, the right and the KKE with PAME, Manos suggests that Syriza would have been in 2012 an electoral receptacle, unrelated to the mass movement. Everyone knows that in the 2000s, Syriza also had an anchor in the trade union movement (notably in education) and with trade union cadres from the KKE, a weaker base than the Social Democracy, the Stalinists and the right, but comparable to that of the far left. And above all, Syriza grew among the youth, like all the radical left, with the rise of the global justice movement. In 2013, Syriza had 30,000 members, and even with militant criteria different in general than the extreme left, it cannot be said, as Manos does, that Syriza "has never been organically linked to the movement" because, seen from the point of view of activist forces on the ground its presence there was at least equivalent to the 3,000 activists claimed by Antarsya. We never said that Syriza was "the organization of the mass movement." On the other hand, yes, Syriza was between 2012 and 2015 the electoral expression of the mass movement of the popular classes, movement of opposition to the memorandum, electoral expression solidly rooted in popular neighbourhoods and localities. If this result appeared in 2012, it is because in the previous years Syriza was identified on a large scale with the struggles, to the gatherings, to the movement of the Indignants. Its result in the parliamentary elections of 2012, going from 4.6% to 16.8% in 3 years, had therefore not come out of the blue. On the other hand, it is quite astounding to read, if we follow Manos correctly, that mechanically Syriza's success was the expression of the tiredness and deceleration of the movement,

or worse than the retreat of the mass movement before spring 2012 was due to Syriza and his political proposals.

The waves of general strikes and movements were quite strong in 2011 and early 2012 to force the traditional parties to unite against the popular revolt and to decide early elections to restore their legitimacy. These elections of 2012 were not wanted and the Greek and European bourgeoisie would have done well.

The challenge of these elections was therefore Greek and European. It is in this sense that we made a declaration between the two elections (Fourth International, 25 May 2012 "[The future of the workers of Europe is being decided in Greece](#)"), while the European right and social democracy went wild in their support for Samaras.

"the Greek radical Left, and in particular Syriza, which today occupies a central place in the Greek political situation, defends a 5-point emergency plan:

1. Abolition of the memoranda, of all measures of austerity and of the counter-reforms of the labour laws which are destroying the country.
2. Nationalization of the banks which have been largely paid by government aid.
3. A moratorium on payment of the debt and an audit which will make it possible to denounce and abolish the illegitimate debt.
4. Abolition of immunity of ministers from prosecution.
5. Modification of the electoral law which allowed PASOK and New Democracy to govern to the detriment of the Greek population and to plunge the country into crisis.

The Fourth International calls on the whole of the international workers' movement, on all the indignant, on all those who defend the ideals of the Left, to support such an emergency programme."

We were convinced of the importance of forming a government to the left of Social Democracy in the next election for workers in Greece and throughout Europe. The arrival of such a government could increase their self-confidence and contribute, under certain circumstances, to a new rise in struggles.

The five points we put forward were the synthesis of the points advanced in the spring of 2012, not only by Syriza but also by Antarsya and linked this position with the demand for an anti-austerity government, a government of the left forces, notably Syriza / Antarsya / KKE, linked to practical proposals of a United Front in action in relation to the same forces. Although Syriza was in favour of such a government; unfortunately the KKE, of course, but also Antarsya, refused this perspective of a united front.

Manos, together with other comrades of the FI, themselves recognized in a contribution of 2012 the importance of making a political response to the Greek crisis, but at the same time wrote that this response could only be propagandist: "a situation in Greece, the watchword of workers' government is becoming relevant. It is obviously not applicable now: it is even difficult to predict at the present time the possible composition. Such a government should be able to implement an emergency program to fight the crisis, ready to implement key transition measures, for example by expropriating banks and other sectors of the economy."(Manos Skofoglou et al, 16 June 2012 "[For a program of confrontation with capitalism, for an independent anticapitalist and revolutionary party](#)".) We were in the

spring of 2012, when Néa Dimocratia and PASOK collapsed and Syriza, with the KKE and Antarsya exceeding the 30% vote on a program of rejection of the memorandums, an anti-austerity program ... In such a situation political crisis, we felt it would be essential to put forward a political response, a government of the left, a Syriza / KKE / Antarsya government, the realization of the slogan of the workers' government, a program of transitional demands that were concretely supported by the Greek left. Paradoxically, by refusing a concrete slogan of this kind, the comrades wrote in the same text: "If a Syriza-led government took measures favourable to workers, such as the questioning of memoranda, it is evident that the revolutionaries would support them, ("[For a program of confrontation with capitalism, for an independent anticapitalist and revolutionary party](#)") while saying that a Syriza government could be nothing but a parliamentary coalition, but without proposing any alternative. We were trying to put forward a comprehensive political response that went beyond propaganda in a situation where the movement was raising the question of a political response and our positions obviously corresponded to positions in the Greek radical left. Concretely, Manos and the OKDE leadership thought it unnecessary to present this global political response, which was also the case for Antarsya, who also refused even to respond to Syriza's proposals for the "government of the left", only calling for the development of struggles without raising the question of government.

Manos poses the question of the strategy put forward by OKDE as an alternative to the proposal of a government of the lefts:

And there the answer is clear. Faced with a major social and political crisis, requiring the implementation of transitional demands, Manos persists in saying that the only answer could only be the call for generalized self-organization. Although real self-organizing experiences existed in Greece in 2012, they were largely limited and marginal. The call for their generalization and, above all, for them to play a central political role, an alternative to the parliamentary system, could not be the answer of the day. If a demand of workers' government could only, according to the comrades be propagandist, then what can we say about a slogan equivalent to "all power to the soviets"?

So our approach to Syriza and the governmental question in 2012 was not an illusion, a hope, but an analysis of the importance of the issue and the need for concrete policy answers. This is a fairly standard approach for revolutionary Marxists. All the more so since the highlighting of the key points on which Syriza had spoken in the May elections and a unit of the anti-austerity left-wing forces corresponded to this concrete situation, opposing the proposals in the leadership Syriza of the government of salvation or national union with capitalist representatives. Moreover, this unique front line for which we spoke was of course about the revolutionary forces present in both Syriza and Antarsya. Therefore, the essential disagreement we expressed was not the party-building choice of OKDE Spartakos not to join Syriza, but the orientation it followed. I would also be important for the comrades to take a balance sheet of the orientation as Antarsya and as OKDE Spartakos in the 2011-2013 period.

Was Syriza different from a reformist party?

We did not need to redwash what Syriza was to defend such an orientation. We have always said and written that Syriza was led by a reformist current, coming from Synaspismos and the euro-communist tradition of gradualism. And within Syriza there was a constant and concrete battle between these reformist currents and the opposition in which anti-capitalist and revolutionary left-wing currents were had a certain weight. We also maintain that, in spite of the bureaucratic methods of the Tsipras leadership (which were challenged on several occasions by DEA comrades) Syriza did not yet have such a strong crystallization of reformist bureaucratic apparatus linked to structures local institutions or the state apparatus itself, as the PCF, the PCE or the Greek or Portuguese communist parties. On the other hand, the OKDE comrades want to make Syriza between 2012 and 2015 an organization equivalent to the social democratic or Stalinist parties. And here again we are dealing with a self-fulfilling prophecy, in the logic of the comrades the future proves the past: the proof that they were inserted in the state apparatus is that they were there easily integrated from January 2015. We said at the same time that the context, which it is unnecessary to describe

again, contributed to giving Syriza a radical role very different from the role played by the European Communist parties, not to mention social-democracy.

Manos blames Syriza's international supporters (including us no doubt) for being blind to Syriza's constant programmatic retreats.

"They supported an "emergency plan", failing to see that not even that would be even achievable since SYRIZA was committed to the bourgeois and imperialist institutions as well as to private property and the rules of capitalist economy." he says. ("[Greece, a story without the distorting prism of Syriza](#)")

We were evidently far from the blissful ignorance described by Manos. Having a united front policy does not imply either naivety or blindness, nor taking will o' the wisp for lanterns or promises for deeds. The secretariat of the Bureau pointed out in its statement made on the eve of 25 January 2015: (Fourth International, 12 January 2015 "[Fourth International: On 25 January, a turning point for Greece and Europe!](#)")

"A lot is at stake today in Syriza, which is at a crossroads. The "presidential office" and Alexis Tsipras – the Syriza leadership – are multiplying contradictory statements: rejection of the troika's "memorandums", stopping paying debt charges, and suppression of most of this debt, but at the same time seeking an agreement with the leaders of the European Union who, in order to continue their loans, demand application of the budget policies, the fall in the Greek people's standard of living, and the destruction of the public services.

At this stage, the dominant theme in Syriza's campaign is the commitments of the Thessalonika programme: restoring wages and pensions to their pre-crisis level; return to the pre-crisis collective agreements; return to a minimum threshold of taxable income to 12,000 euros; suppression of the tax on heating fuel oil. These measures, if they are applied, will have a meaning for the Greek people and further afield in Europe: austerity can be blocked.

This is why this dual discourse will very quickly run up against the policy of the ruling classes, in Greece and Europe: either the diktats of the EU are accepted, and the experiment will be defeated, or one remains faithful to the fight against austerity, while calling for mass mobilization, and there is the possibility of a social rebound. It will be difficult to escape this alternative. "

And to continue with the following paragraph in this statement, quoted by Manos but stopping midway:

"The challenge is clear and decisive: it is necessary to defeat the Greek right and far right and to do everything so that the Greek left, of which Syriza is the main component, wins these elections, in order to create a social and political dynamic for a left government, which must strive to bring together all the forces ready to break with the austerity policy and to fight against the pitfalls of chauvinistic nationalism. This government must be a government of the lefts and not a national union government preparing conciliation with the ruling classes and the EU. The rejection of the memorandums, of the budgetary diktats of the EU, the non-repayment of most of the debt, the first measures of an anti-austerity government, are the questions on which the confrontation with the EU will be played out, but they will not be able to be consolidated without a policy which from the outset breaks with all the antisocial attacks on the Greek people in the last four years in the field of wages, health, the right to work and housing; which starts to take anticapitalist measures, of incursion into capitalist property, nationalization of the banks, and certain key sectors of the economy, reorganization of the economy to satisfy elementary social needs. To impose these solutions, social mobilization, workers' control, self-organization and social self-management are essential. Finally the conquest of the government, within a parliamentary framework, can, in exceptional circumstances, be a first step on the path to an anticapitalist rupture but, there too, this one can be confirmed only if one government anti-austerity creates the conditions for a new power being pressed on Popular Assemblies, in the companies, the districts and the cities."

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We could say more. But the question that we were continually posing was the unity of the radical left:

“For the slogan “Not one step backwards” to take on stronger substance, it must gain support from a unitive policy of the whole of the Greek left, Syriza obviously but also the KKE and Antarsya. Within the KKE, there are increasing doubts about the ultra-sectarian orientation of the leadership. As for Antarsya, it is divided on the possibility of an alliance with a “national communist” current – Alvanos’s Plan B. The Greek left wing, Syriza and Antarsya have particular responsibility in building a unitive project, which goes beyond these organizations, but can bring together trade unionists, campaign activists, ecologists.”

Finally in February 2015, during the IC meeting, after the agreement between Varoufakis, Tsipras et la Troïka we could only confirm this orientation:

“The demands put forward by the Eurogroup demonstrate that the idea of a break with the austerity policies without a confrontation with the European Union is impossible in practice.

Over and above the words, in the first agreements made between the Eurogroup and the government of Tsipras, the government undertakes to reimburse fully and in respect of the deadlines its creditors. This is a retreat on the undertakings given to the Greek people.”(Fourth International, 2 March 2015 [“Solidarity with the Greek people!”](#))

We must also note that this resolution was voted unanimously (with 4 abstentions) by the members of the International Committee. Manos himself did not propose any amendment or contradictory resolution, limiting himself to one abstention (three other comrades also abstained, the IC not having incorporated amendments attenuating the criticism vis-à-vis Syriza).

We are therefore very far from an alleged line of the FI of political support to Tsipras, of tailending the leadership of Syriza which Manos denounces in his text.

The same debate continued during the final crisis of the first Tsipras government in June / July 2015 around the adoption of a third memorandum. And once again, Manos twists the positions of the Bureau to justify his thesis of "support of the FI Bureau for Tsipras"

Manos writes, referring to the resolution of 7 July written the day after the overwhelming victory from the NO to the referendum, "the statement of the FI Bureau praised the SYRIZA government and called the people to support it once again," (Fourth International, 8 July 2015 [“The victory of the "no" announces decisive battles against the Troika](#)”)

Whatever Manos says, neither in June nor in February did we trust Tsipras. We had the same position as that expressed in February and on the eve of the referendum. We explained that Tsipras since February had been ready to make maximum concessions and to implement new austerity measures demanded by the Troika, but that the problem was that EU leaders wanted political capitulation and in no way which might have seemed honourable to Tsipras, both in Greece and in Europe. We were also obviously saying what the Greek Left was saying, whether it was the comrades of Antarsya or those of the left of Syriza, that the continuation of the NO would be a total break with the dictates, the cancellation of payment of the debt, nationalization and direct control of the entire banking system. The realization of these tasks could only be the result of popular mobilization. And we reaffirm (statement of 7 July 2015 [“The victory of the "no" announces decisive battles against the Troika](#)”) that "the alternative for the Greek government will be the same as in the previous weeks: accept an agreement that will continue and aggravate attacks against the population or take another path, that of rupture "and we had the same approach as before in relation to the Greek government: to affirm that "The workers of Europe, who are being hit by the same policies, will have to mobilize alongside the Greek social and political movement in opposition to austerity, alongside the Greek

government in all the measures it may take to resist the diktat of the Troika." (as before, Manos makes only partial citations of our resolutions ...). We do not reject a word of this resolution which, of course, was not about "praising" the Tsipras government.

We always take responsibility for our positions: support for the movement, for Greek workers, for all their organizations, including its essential component, Syriza, in the face of attacks by the Troika and European capitalist leaders. We also take part in the campaign for the audit of Greece, support for the rejection of the memoranda and the unilateral suspension of the payment of the debt, a campaign deemed confused by OKDE-Spartakos comrades. The FI and its sections in Europe, in particular, have also put their strength into developing a network of concrete solidarity with the Greek social and political movement, through political initiatives, networking ... which had no complacency or optimism towards the government and aimed instead to support those who in Greece were building social mobilization. And here, we must recognize the weakness of the mobilization in Europe, despite the determined action of many militants.

On the other hand, we also, in the aftermath of the final surrender of Tsipras, took a stance for the action in Greece of all the left-wing forces opposed to this capitulation, while the OKDE-Spartakos comrades (like Manos in his text) placed the Syriza leadership and the left opposition which was going to form Popular Unity on practically the same level.

This debate is essential. In Europe, we are or may be confronted with situations similar to the Greek experience, with the crisis of institutional parties. We must therefore develop our thinking on the initiatives to be taken for anti-capitalist fronts to form and be built, bringing together forces opposed to austerity policies. We must develop our thinking on the need for a political strategy posing the question of anti-austerity governments committed to taking emergency measures to block capitalist policies. Similarly, the Greek experience, and the capitulation of Tsipras, strengthens us in the direct contradiction between an anti-austerity policy and respect for the rules of the European Union. On the other hand, on several occasions, Antarsya's comrades thought that the vector "exit from the euro" could be the main axis of a gathering, with openings on the side of Alavanos, notably against the Directorate of Syriza. We still believe that this orientation was a dead end.

Similarly, we must also make comparative balance sheets for the years 2011/2014 in Greece and the Spanish state, although comparisons are always risky. In the Spanish state, as a result of the movement of the Indignants, Podemos was a constituent process relying on the occupation of the Squares. With a more powerful movement in Greece, an opportunity has perhaps been missed to launch a similar process of opening the anticapitalist currents to the new forces of the movement ...

In any case, we believe that the independent existence of organizations on a revolutionary basis, together with propaganda for self-organization, cannot take the place of strategy, especially when the social and political crisis poses objectively the question of anti-austerity government .

We must all have the modesty of our failures, but also the certainty that political responses are indispensable.

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