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A defeat for the right, but now its policies have to be defeated!

30 October 2009, by **Andreas Sartzekis** , **Tassos Anastassiadis**

From a 74% participation rate in the parliamentary elections of 2007, we were down to, respectively, 52.6 % in the European elections of June 2009 (63% in 2004), and 70 % in the elections of October 4, 2009.

And yet the results of these elections are very interesting: firstly for the real slap in the face delivered to the right, much stronger than what the last published polls in mid-September had predicted, and then for the big electoral victory for PASOK, unmatched lately in Europe for social democracy! But a first analysis of results to the left of PASOK is obviously essential to aid understanding of the political situation in a country marked in recent years by great social struggles, including the gigantic youth revolt in December 2008.

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Party name	2009 %	2009 Votes	2009 Elected officials	2007 %	2007 Votes	2007 Elected officials
PASOK	43.92 %	3,012,373	160	38.10 %	2,727,279	102
New Democracy	33.48 %	2,295,967	91	41.84 %	2,994,979	152
KKE	7.54 %	517,154	21	8.15 %	583,750	22
LAOS	5.63 %	386,152	15	3.80 %	271,809	10
SYRIZA	4.60 %	315,627	13	5.04 %	361,101	14
Green environmentalists	2.53 %	173,449	0	1.05 %	75,502	0
Renaissance Democratic (nationalist right)	0.45 %	30,856	0	0.80 %	57,167	0
ANTARSYA	0.51 %	24,737	0	0.32 %	22,447	0

Note: in 2007, there was no ANTARSYA list, but two lists of

coalitions which then formed this unitary grouping.

A PASOK tidal wave

Some compare the results for PASOK to 1981, when for the first time in its history, Greece elected a left Government without any pre-emptive coup d'état. The comparison is exaggerated, but the results are impressive: while in September 2007, Greece saw almost all areas dominated by right, that is exactly the opposite of what occurred this time. PASOK, credited with 39 to 41 % in the polls, got 43.92% of the vote against 38.10% in 2007 and 36.6% in the 2009 European elections. Traditionally right wing regions went over to PASOK, like Florina, in the North, where it won a majority for the first time. And above all, whereas the question in mid-September was whether it would win the 151 seats necessary to govern alone, it won 160.

Of course governments have for decades been shared in Greece between the right wing party and PASOK, directed moreover by a few large families (Papandreou, Karamanlis, Mitsotakis and others).

But this fixation on the "two party system" characteristic of the KKE (the Greek CP) or SYRIZA (the radical left around Synapismos) hides two indisputable facts: the first is that even in 2007, left parties were in the majority in Greece, and this situation should have encouraged united front frameworks to better combat a right that was in reality in the minority. Which was never done, largely on the pretext of combating the two party system. Secondly, PASOK has a significant popular base, as can be seen in the trade unions and as shown by its results in the popular neighbourhoods (44.2%) in Egaleo, where the KKE got 13.1%, Syriza 6.8%; 45.7% in Kamatero, with 13.1% for the KKE, 5.2% for Syriza; 43.7% in Peristeri with 13.4% for the KKE and 6.5% for Syriza). At the national level, it got 39% of the votes of private sector employees (11% for the KKE and 8% for Syriza) and 47% of those in the public sector (7% each for the KKE and Syriza). And if one considers regions based on the criterion of poverty, PASOK got 43 % in the poorest, Pella (4.3% for KKE, 2.5% for Syriza), 49 % in Etolo-Acarmania (6.2% and 2.8%), 53% in Rodope (2.5% and 4.2%). The vote for PASOK has therefore a class character. and the popular sectors have used it to throw

out the right.

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We are then some distance from the crisis PASOK went through after 2004, which had led the party to the edge of a split. Giorgos Papandreu, the much less charismatic son of his father Andreas (the founder of PASOK), president of the Socialist International and a believer in "participatory democracy", was able to impose a "modernist" left line referring to Obama. Of course, the programme of PASOK only superficially involves a break with rightist policies. Its electoral programme is a catalogue of very general principles, for equality between women and men, for effective income support for farmers, strengthening of workers' rights to information and negotiation, reducing deregulation of the labour market, the same generalities put forward for the European elections in June and on which most people agree! But apart from the talk of transparency of the State apparatus, there is an emphasis on a more Keynesian crisis management, with support for wage demands and productive mobilization of liquidity previously available to the banks, while the right's program was the destruction and the rapid recomposition of capital in favour of the productive sectors. It should be noted that this is the reason for which PASOK got real support from some sectors of the bourgeoisie, threatened in the short-term by the crisis. But the contradictions of this policy may explode in the very short term as a result of the violence of the crisis and the European neoliberal framework: it will be necessary to very quickly decide between two roads that involve opposed class choices.

This is where the right and the parties to the left of PASOK have tried to criticise Papandreu's electoral campaign, demanding he set out concretely and costs his measures! But in fact, the principle that will guide the policy of PASOK has just been enunciated by the spokesperson of the new government, Giorgos Petalotis, concerning the status of the commercial port of Piraeus, assigned by the right to a Chinese company: "we want to ensure, with public interest criteria, healthy competition."

We know better than ever, one year after the outbreak of the crisis and the so-called reforms of capitalism, what the public interest is when it comes to preserving the criteria of the capitalist economy!

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A right in crisis, a far right to watch

The defeat is conclusive: 10.5% behind PASOK (in 2007, it was 3.7% ahead), 8% and close to 800,000 votes down in 2 years. The demagoguery on a so-called social right collapsed: in two years, the right has confirmed its involvement in financial scandals, its inability to guarantee essential functions (lack of government to deal with the catastrophic fires of the summers of 2007 and 2009), but especially its alignment with the policies of the European right in the social field. Result: catastrophic unemployment figures. Thus, there were 50,000 more unemployed in July (+ 129,000 in one year) an official figure around 10 %, but in truth around 15 % according to the GSEE trade union confederation, with categories (those aged under 24: 24 %) and regions (Macedonia, Epirus) facing near disaster. In contradiction with the official discourse of Karamanlis on measures to reduce state debt, 53 billion Euros have also been quietly borrowed over the last 3 years, while at the same time purchasing power has shrunk, although never by enough in the eyes of the Greek employers!

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All this, added to the choice of indiscriminate repression against workers and the young people, to that of increasing military spending to the detriment of funds for fire fighting, has discredited conclusively the right of Kostas Karamanlis, nephew of the former leader of the right, Konstantinos. Faced with the urgent need to defend big capital, he tried to campaign on the theme of the need for tough anti-crisis measures (a public deficit probably around 12% of GDP this year, enormous debt at 108 %, trade deficit at 12 %). His defeat is therefore that of a policy desired by the big employers and this must be recalled tirelessly when PASOK tries

to impose the same measures (pensions, social security and so on)

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In the meantime, the magnitude of the defeat caused a major crisis in the right: on the evening of the elections, Karamanlis announced that he was resigning as president of the party, and at least 4 candidates have emerged to take his place. Since then, war has raged, strengthening the crisis situation without offering a credible alternative and thus presaging a very tough period for the Greek right. Indeed, at least 2 of the candidates are "heirs": Dora Bakoyannis, daughter of the former prime minister Kostas Mitsotakis and herself a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Antonis Samaras, scion of a great family of the Greek bourgeoisie and regarded as a traitor to the party by many for having founded in the 1990s the nationalist groupuscule "Political Spring". The third is the former Mayor of Athens, Dimitri Avramopoulos, an intriguing character who tried to play a few years ago on an "apolitical" profile to launch a "new centre" which quickly ran into the sand. As for the fourth, Panayotis Psomiadis, prefect of the region of Thessaloniki, he is an extremely dangerous populist characterised by nationalism and links with the far right. Regardless of who its new President is. New Democracy will take time to find a semblance of unity.

In such a situation, the immediate danger to workers could come from the extreme right: in this country where the memory of the fascist military junta of 1967-74 is still alive, fascists, even if they have been protected by the state apparatus, were until now a fringe phenomenon. For a few years now, with the pauperisation of the popular sectors and the massive arrival of impoverished refugees at this eastern frontier of Europe, the far right has raised its head around a caudillo, Giorgos Karatzaferis who wants to copy the success of the Front National in France: populism, racist campaigns against immigrants, attempts to gain respectability. Its success in the European parliamentary elections in June (366,600 votes, 7.15%, compared with 4.12% in 2004) showed its influence and resulted in an immediate

alignment of the Government on its positions. Throughout the summer, the police mounted spectacular and shameful raid operations in neighbourhoods inhabited by immigrants, often on the basis of local hate campaigns conducted by the extreme right. In general, although Karamanlis always excluded specific alliances with the far right, an extremist hardening has taken place on the ground, facilitated by the presence of an extreme right in the kernel of New Democracy (illustrated by Psoyiadis, but it is far from being isolated). What is most obvious is the tolerance of the Government towards a neo-Nazi groupuscule, Chryssi Avgi ("Golden Dawn"), which is not only protected by the police, but openly work with them at demonstrations! The new PASOK minister of public order has also just said he is shocked by such complicity which he has witnessed in the recent past and one wonders what the consequences will be.

The big question in this period is whether Karatzaferis's party "LAOS" (the people), will be able to take advantage of the crisis on the right. Answer: no doubt, but to a more limited extent than one might fear. Indeed, a vacuum has appeared on the right, as we said, well before the elections, and in addition, as history always shows, anti-immigrant measures strengthen the extreme right vote. We might therefore have feared the worst, with many polls showing LAOS between 6 and 7 % before even the full election campaign, at which the party had 2 strengths: lots of money, and a leader capable of developing on TV the theme of "the true right", playing also on the weaknesses of the left. However, even if its score increased compared to the parliamentary elections of 2007 (it then obtained 271,000 votes, 3.8 per cent and 10 members), and even though it became the 4th biggest party ahead of Syriza, its success was still contained, and the disappointment was visible among the supporters of LAOS. That said, the political and social field remains full of potential for this group ranging from the disappointed of the right to recycled neo-Nazis and anti-racist and anti-fascist vigilance is a permanent task for workers' organizations,

especially if we take into account the fact that the neo-Nazi groupuscule Chryssi Avgi obtained an impressive score, given its discourse and practices, 19,600 votes and 0.29 %.

A setback for the KKE

For several years, the KKE leadership has embarked on a radical policy in its discourse and sometimes in practice, but marked in fact by a sectarianism which would be unimaginable for many European countries (including Portugal) and support for the bourgeois order if it is threatened by a mobilization it doesn't control. The KKE adopts a radical discourse which would not be foreign to the French NPA or comrades of the Fourth International (a break with capitalism, dynamic mobilizations in support of struggles) so that this party, who had lost all its youth in the early 1990s, has recruited many young people. At the same time, this apparent radicalism is accompanied by sectarian acts not serving the interests of workers. Thus, while with the GSEE Confederation, workers have a single federation (in addition, this union discusses permanently on the basis of contradictory lines, even if instead of union tendencies, it is a matter of strict political factions ranging from the far left to the right), the KKE has created a current, PAME, which in fact plays the role of a 2nd union and whose only action is to call mobilizations separately from GSEE. Lately, this "radicalism" has stressed the benefits of Stalin, up to the point of denying his crimes, attributed to fear of the bourgeoisie! In the same way the newspaper "Rizospastis" also published a few months ago a long article on the NPA in France, to demonstrate that this party was at the service of the bourgeoisie (without providing support to the PCF: the KKE has links with the remaining ultra-Stalinist sectors of the PCF or those which have left it)! PASOK is the great Devil and Syriza, whose historical leaders had founded Synaspismos with the KKE at the beginning of the 1990s to form a Government with the right, is a true enemy!

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During the youth mobilizations of

December 2008, while participating in the mobilizations with separate demonstrations, the KKE adopted the same discourse as Karamanlis against Syriza who supposedly had encouraged "looters" (!), and this when the urgent task for the left was precisely to give political expressions (self-organization, extension to the labour movement) avoided by the violent movement of the first days after the killing of Alexis Grigoriadis killing by a police officer. There are many more examples of situations where the KKE, instead of strengthening youth and worker mobilisations, has actually rendered service to the right by its sectarianism.

Indeed, while the KKE has for several elections reinforced its electoral weight, the European elections were a signal. Even taking account of the increase in abstentions, it got 428,000 votes (8.35%) against 580,000 ((9.48%) in 2004. At the parliamentary elections, even if it remains the 3rd party, it lost 70,000 votes and went from 8.15% to 7.53% of the vote with a noted decline in working class neighbourhoods that even its General Secretary, Aleka Papariga, deemed worrying. After initial explanations of a purely Stalinist kind (it was the fault of the media, PASOK and so on - all in the framework of a offensive programmed by the bourgeoisie against THE workers' party) the leadership has promised to investigate the results. Let us be sure: there is nothing to expect on this front!

However, it would seem that a challenge to the line is beginning to appear. According to the press, the leadership received a text signed by "cadres and members of important sectors of the KKE", which says: "it is not possible that it is always the fault of others. Let us stop insisting on the forward march of the working-class, while we have not succeeded in greatly distinguishing what are in fact today the characteristics or changes that have occurred in it! (...) Why exclude working with other forces, for the sake of ideological purity? Why continue the theoretical analyses questioning any challenge to Stalin? Why are we unable to see that Greek society is moving in completely different directions? Our result does

not correspond to expectations, perhaps because we ourselves are not in correspondence with society?" A few months after a Congress cut off from the everyday reality of workers and youth, and despite the non-election to the CC of 2 or 3 dinosaurs, does this text presage, on the basis of the worrying results, the beginning of a critical discussion and profound developments? For the time being, the leadership of the KKE vehemently denies the existence of this text and cries provocation! To be continued...

SYRIZA: little more than the objective of survival

For Syriza, the outcome of the European elections was a real trauma and the opportunity for a return to prosaic realities. Although the leadership of this grouping of Synaspismos with small groups of the radical and revolutionary left knew that it was now far from the poll ratings of 18% in Spring 2008, the objectives were announced as sure: more than 10% of the vote and 3 MEPs. Result: 240,900 votes (250,400 in 2004), 4.7% (against 4.1) and 1MEP, as in 2004. Immediately, a violent crisis broke in this grouping. Firstly, the left in Syriza said that it was the fault the renovator current of Syn, then the criticism extended to the whole of Syn, and by the end of August, we saw most of these groups take a position between the two Syn leaders belonging to the same majority current: Alekos Alavanos and Alexis Tsipras. In these internal debates the group Kokkino, sympathetic to the Fourth International, split around the debate inside Syriza. The reaction of Syn as ultra dominant party in the grouping was to impose its solution to rescue a situation where the polls showed the risk of Syriza falling below the 3% threshold necessary to enter Parliament. Following a series of meetings of the leadership and the currents of Syn the candidacy of Tsipras. the young leader of Syn, was "proposed" . And it is to the latter's credit that he succeeded in recent

weeks in giving Syriza a semblance of unity with a campaign that succeeded in remobilising supporters and voters. Result: much better than 3%, Syriza got 315,000 votes (against 361,000 in 2007) and 4.6% (against 5.04%). It thus elected 13 deputies (14 in 2007) but became the 5th party behind LAOS. That said, Tsipras and a few cadres around Synaspismos have managed to save the parliamentary existence of Syriza, and it is good that the radical left can be heard. Its disappearance would also no doubt led both to the end of the Syriza group and the breakup of Synaspismos. But beyond numbers and Tsipras's merit, this election result is almost exclusively attributable to Synaspismos, both in terms of the campaign and in the results.

Indeed, the objective of the campaign was clearly determined by Tsipras: "our objective is to win in relation to the entry threshold for Parliament" ("Eleftherotypia", September 29, 2009). Thus emergency measures to make the bosses pay, unitary mobilizations, the prospects for a necessary break with the capitalist system have taken second place to the objective priority, an input into Parliament and the institutional existence of Syriza. The vote won remains higher than that obtained by Synaspismos alone at the parliamentary elections of 2004 (241,500 votes, 7.2 %) and 2000 (219,900 votes, 3.2%) but lower than in 1996 (347,000,) 5.12%). Of the 13 deputies, 10 are members of Syn (including at least 4 from its renovator current), and the other 3 are not members of radical or revolutionary left groups, but independent activists related to Syn. Hence, while it is necessary to discuss on the ground with Syn, to campaign together whenever possible, the urgent thing is not to help it maintain itself in the name of a left language which remains very relative, but to build an independent anti-capitalist left.

However, this is not necessarily the turn which the discussions in the left of Syriza will take: at a meeting of various components on the left of Synaspismos, questions focused primarily on the organizational future of Syriza... and on the distribution of the money paid to Syriza's deputies! It

will also be very interesting to see what will emerge from the preparatory discussion at the national Syriza meeting planned for November to decide on its future organizational form. In this new phase, we can see that it is important to discuss with the left components the increased opportunities to build an anti-capitalist left.

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The Anti-Capitalist Left, too slowly, but surely

We know that the tradition of dispersal of the revolutionary forces in Greece has something incomprehensible about it, and there is much delay in relation to other countries with strong social mobilizations in the project of build a unifying instrument of anti-capitalist forces. Although the scores remain very limited, elements in the results of the ANTARSYA grouping allow us to assert that the "left landscape " is being clarified in the right direction.

Two years ago a first step had occurred with the presentation of two "fronts" each grouping the two biggest organizations of the Greek far left, the NAR (a group born after initially on the left of the KKE involving most of its youth) and the SEK (sister organisation of the British SWP). One, MERA (around NAR), got 11,800 votes (0.17%), and the other, ENANTIA (SEK and other organizations, including OKDE-SPARTAKOS, Greek section of the Fourth International), 10,600 votes and 0.15%. At the same time, two Maoist organizations (KKE - ML and ML - KKE!) secured 0.25 and 0.11 % of the votes.

Two years later, the two groupings have joined forces, on the basis of joint mobilizations (December 2008) and the anti-capitalist regroupments underway in Europe. In the June 2009 European elections the grouping ANTARSYA obtained 22,000 voice and 0.43%, arriving in 13th place, with the Maoists getting 0.26% of the votes. For these parliamentary elections, ANTARSYA waged a good campaign in accordance with its activist

implantation, while the situation was unfavourable in electoral terms: a strong polarization to get rid of the right (and for the survival of Syriza), and no access to the media, unlike the institutional parties who virtually camped in the TV studios! However, ANTARSYA got 24,700 votes and 0.36%, coming 8th just after the Greens and the group of a former PASOK minister of nationalist obsessions with a high media profile. And most importantly, the two Maoist groups went down to 0.16% and 0.08%: the left landscape has therefore been clarified and we can be sure that if the stakes for Syriza had not been so dramatic, voters would have been attracted by the anti-

capitalist left list. In any case, this result strengthens the common will to continue in the construction of such a left, and the key issue in the period will of course be to make progress in areas such as the establishment of united front frameworks, the discussion with the sectors of Syriza which will pose the question of independence in relation to that organisation, and so on. The upcoming mobilizations will of course be the best framework for working together.

First mobilisations

PASOK's initial measures do not break with the policies of Karamanlis: the

minister for "protection of the citizen" Chrysoschoñdis, has sent a veritable army of police to occupy the protest district of Exarchia (in central Athens). The goal: to show that with PASOK, republican order will reign everywhere. Already, protest mobilizations have taken place in this neighbourhood, where young Alexis was killed last year. Papandreou has made an alarmist speech on the state of the economy: there is therefore no doubt on the continuation of the policy favourable to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The workers for their part will not grant this Government the luxury of a period of "state of grace".

Significant election year

26 October 2009, by Danielle Sabai

The country is one of the biggest archipelagos in the world with around 17,500 islands. Organising elections there is a real logistical nightmare. Several weeks were needed to obtain definitive results. However from the evening onwards it was clear that the outgoing president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (known as SBY), had won the elections in the first round with more than 60% of the vote, leaving the other candidates far behind. Three candidates were running. In addition to the current president, SBY, there was the current vice-president Jusuf Kalla and the former president from 2001 to 2004, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of the first president of Indonesia after independence, Sukarno.

Military still very much present

It is now 10 years since Indonesians freed themselves from the yoke of Suharto's military dictatorship. During the 33 years of this "new order" between 1 and 2 million Indonesians,

partisans of Sukarno, Communists, socialists, human rights activists and trades unionists were disappeared, imprisoned, tortured and killed. The breadth of the crimes committed is still not known. Unlike Latin America, Cambodia or Rwanda, nobody from the military has yet been tried, or is threatened with being tried. On the contrary, the three pairings who contested the presidential election all included a retired military man, which is revealing of the still significant political and economic power of the army.

The current vice-president Jusuf Kalla, leader of Golkar (Suharto's party during the dictatorship) has as his running mate Wiranto, the leader of the Hanura (Hati Nurani Rakyat, Party of the Consciousness of the People) party, a former prominent soldier under Suharto. He is formally accused of crimes against humanity when he led the armed forces in East Timor at the time of its independence vote, in August 1999. At least 1,400 Timorese died at this time and tens of thousands of them were deported to western Timor which remained under

Indonesian control. In addition the region was pillaged by the Indonesian military. Wiranto avoided trial thanks to the Indonesian authorities who rejected his extradition to East Timor. He is however subject to an international arrest warrant.

Prabowo Subianto, leader of Gerindra (Gerakan Indonesia Raya, Party of the Movement for a Greater Indonesia), the running mate of Megawati (head of the PDI-P, Democratic Indonesian Party of Struggle) was, during the dictatorship, one of the leaders of the Kopassus, a military unit specialising in counter-insurrection, renowned for its atrocities. He is accused of being behind the disappearance of several dozen pro-democracy activists in May 1998, during the last hours of Suharto's dictatorship. Prabowo is also known for his sinister record in Eastern Timor and West Papua. But he enjoys significant support in business circles and in the army as well as family connections (he is the ex-husband of Suharto's daughter, Titiek).

Three candidates, one neoliberal agenda

Finally, SBY is himself a retired general. Like his rivals, he served in the 1970s in Timor during the occupation at a time when there were serious violations of human rights. The leader of the Democratic Party, he led a coalition of 18 parties at these elections, of which several were Islamic. As a good indicator of the policies followed, his running mate, Boediono, was previously the head of the central bank and an economist much admired by the IMF. Boediono was the minister of finance for Megawati before becoming minister of the economy for SBY. The current Vice-president under SBY, Jusuf Kalla and SBY himself were also ministers under Megawati. So the political differences between the three candidates were very tenuous.

Although their campaigns had different accents, they shared the same neoliberal agenda. They have played an active role in this decade (1999-2009) in implementing neoliberal policies which led to an increase in poverty, unemployment and environmental damage. Jusuf Kalla played the nationalist card by promoting the strengthening of domestic capitalism and a weakening of the domination of foreign capital. Megawati used a populist rhetoric, which has little to do with the policies

he followed for the 4 years of his presidency.

SBY is considered by "The Economist" as the champion of foreign investors. He suppressed petrol subsidies so as to reduce the budget deficit. To avoid protests as in Malaysia, he decided to pay every three months the equivalent of 26 dollars to the poorest and to grant them free primary health care. He enjoys a great popularity, in part thanks to this aid and the fight against corruption led by a commission which was independent, but from which he drew a certain prestige.

On the left

It is virtually impossible for left forces to contest elections. A presidential candidate should be supported by a party or coalition representing 20% of the seats in the national assembly or 25% of votes cast.

Most of the Indonesian left organisations campaigned for abstention or a militant boycott of the elections, known under the name of Golput. At the time of Suharto, this movement allowed the denunciation of the electoral farces organised regularly by the dictatorship. Today, in the absence of a credible left candidate, the call for a boycott offered a possibility of expressing discontent.

Not all the left chose to participate in this campaign. The preparation of these elections led to a split in the PRD (Democratic People's Party), a

left party which played a major role in the fight against Suharto in the 1990s. A part of the PRD, and its electoral coalition Papernas, decided to lead their own electoral campaign. On this occasion, the main leader of the PRD, Dita Sari, set up a new group, the "Courageous Volunteers to Revive Self-sufficiency" (RBBM) to support the candidacy of the Kalla - Wiranto duo. They claim that, among the candidates, the positions defended by Jusuf Kalla are the closest to the positions of Papernas concerning self-sufficiency and the construction of a national industry. They even claim that the candidacies of Kalla and Megawati represent an alternative to the neoliberal policies of SBY.

The other party of the PRD, disagreeing with this electoral tactic, was excluded and has since formed the "Political Committee for the Poor-PRD" (KPRM-PRD) which took an active part in the campaign for a boycott of the elections.

Tactical electoral questions take on a particularly complex character in a country like Indonesia where the rules do not allow progressive left organisations to wage a campaign for their own candidate. However, by trying at any price to gain deputies, Dita Sari has put herself at the service of parties originating from the dictatorship and serving the economic interests of the bourgeoisie. This opportunism could sow dangerous illusions and weaken the Indonesian left.

Marxist leader killed in suicidal attack

21 October 2009, by **Farooq Tariq**

The unfortunate side of this episode is that the body of Master Khudad is not handed over to his relatives. A picture of the dead bodies printed in a local paper confirmed the relatives on 18 October that Master Khudad is among the victims.

He was missing from home since 15

October and there was no clue of him.

Master Khudad was the deputy general secretary of Pakistan Workers Confederation, a founding member of Bonded Labour Liberation Front and was a close friend of Ihsan Ullah Khan, who lives in exile in Sweden.

Pakistan Worker Confederation is the main body of trade unions in Pakistan.

Master Khudad was elected provincial information secretary of Labour Party Pakistan in its founding congress held on 21 November 2004 in

North West Frontier Province. He remained a committed member of LPP till his death.

Master Khudad was one of the very few labour leaders of the province who had organized the working class all their lives.

I had not many meetings with him but when he accepted our invitation to join LPP and took active part in mobilising the membership for the

two days founding congress of LPP in 2004, I had a chance to discuss with him in detail. He accepted to be part of the leadership.

Master khudad main contribution to the working class movement in Pakistan has been his role in establishing Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF). He helped many to flee from the chains of slavery.

Farooq Ahmad member national

executive committee LPP in collaboration of others is launching a campaign to recover his body.

This is the second main leader of LPP who have lost his life in a suicidal attack. Earlier Abdullah Qureshi, a senior leader of LPP was killed in December 2007 in Matta, Swat by a religious fanatics in a suicidal attack.

Here is a part of press report printed by Daily News on September 2007.

YES to BDS!

13 October 2009, by **Michel Warschawski**



Michel Warschawski

Moreover, the group of Israelis supporting BDS, under the label "Boycott from Within" is gaining some momentum, thanks, among other, to a public appeal by Naomi Klein to Israeli activists when she came to Tel Aviv to present the Hebrew version of her "Shock Doctrine".

The fact that there is an (even small) Israeli voice to support the international BDS campaign makes a lot of difference, and, among other, helps to disarm the infamous accusation of Anti-Semitism raised by the Israeli propaganda machine against everyone who dare to criticize the colonial policies of the Jewish State. Moreover, as I will argue towards the end of this article, the Israeli supporters of BDS are in fact expressing the true and long-term interests of the Israeli people. Reading recently two texts of Uri Avnery criticizing BDS convinced me that it was important to clarify how positive is that campaign and why should it be supported by as many Israelis as possible.

I sometimes disagree with Avnery's opinions - though much less than in

the past - but I have great respect for the man, the journalist, the activist and the analyst, and since the bankruptcy of Peace Now during the Oslo process, we have been closely active together. I may even say that we became friends. This is why I feel compelled to react to his criticism of the BDS campaign.

In order to present in the most accurate way Uri's position, I will not use paraphrases, but quote what I think to be his main arguments.

(...) I HAVE no argument with people who hate Israel. That's entirely their right. I just don't think that we have any common ground for discussion.

I would only like to point out that hatred is a very bad advisor. Hatred leads nowhere, but to more hatred. That, by the way, is a positive lesson we can draw from the South African experience. There they overcame hatred to a remarkable extent, largely thanks to the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" headed by Archbishop Tutu, where people admitted their past offenses.

One thing is certain: hatred does not lead towards peace. Let me be quite explicit about this, because I sense that some people, in their righteous indignation over Israel's occupation,

have lost sight of this.

Peace is made between enemies, after war, in which awful things invariably happen. Peace can be made and maintained between peoples who are prepared to live with each other, respect each other, recognize the humanity of each other. They don't have to love each other (...)

I ALSO have no argument with those who want to abolish the State of Israel. It is as much their right to aspire to that as it is my right to want to dismantle, let's say, the USA or France, neither of which has an unblemished past.

Reading some of the messages sent to me and trying to analyze their contents, I get the feeling they are not so much about a boycott on Israel as about the very existence of Israel. Some of the writers obviously believe that the creation of the State of Israel was a terrible mistake to start with, and therefore should be reversed. Turn the wheel of history back some 62 years and start anew.

What really disturbs me about this is that almost nobody in the West comes out and says clearly: Israel must be abolished. Some of the proposals, like those for a "One State" solution, sound like euphemisms. If one

believes that the State of Israel should be abolished and replaced by a State of Palestine or a State of Happiness - why not say so openly?

Of course, that does not mean peace. Peace between Israel and Palestine presupposes that Israel is there. Peace between the Israeli people and the Palestinian people presupposes that both peoples have a right to self-determination and agree to the peace. Does anyone really believe that racist monsters like us would agree to give up our state because of a boycott? (...)

THE REAL argument is among those who want to see peace between the two states, Israel and Palestine. The question is: how can it be achieved? This is an honest debate and is generally conducted in a civil manner (...)

The advocates of boycott believe that the main, indeed the only way to induce Israel to give up the occupied territories and agree to peace is to exert pressure from the outside.

I have no quarrel with the idea of outside pressure. The question is: pressure on whom? On the government, the settlers and their supporters? Or on the entire Israeli people?

(...) The struggle is on, it is a hard struggle against determined opposition, and we should do all we can to help Obama's peace policy to prevail. We must do this as Israelis, from inside Israel, and thereby show that this is not a struggle of the US against Israel, but a joint struggle against the Israeli government and the settlers.

It follows that any boycott must serve this purpose: to isolate the settlers and the individuals and institutions which openly support them, but not declare war on Israel and the Israeli people as such. In the 11 years since Gush Shalom declared a boycott of the products of the settlements, this process has been gaining momentum. We must laud the Norwegian decision, this week, to divest from the Israeli Elbit company because of their involvement with the "Separation Fence" that is being built on Palestinian land and whose main

purpose is to annex occupied territories to Israel. This is a splendid example: a focused action against a specific target, based on a ruling of the International Court.

(...) I have been asked about the Palestinian reaction to the boycott idea. At present, Palestinians do not boycott even the settlements, indeed it is Palestinian workers who are building almost all the houses there, out of economic necessity. Their feelings can only be guessed. All self-respecting Palestinians would, of course, support any effective measure directed against the occupation. But it would not be honest to dangle before their eyes the false hope that a worldwide boycott would bring Israel to its knees. The truth is that only the close cooperation of Palestinian, Israeli and international peace forces could generate the necessary momentum to end the occupation and achieve peace.

This is especially important because our task in Israel today is not so much to convince the majority of Israelis that peace is good and the price acceptable, but first that peace is possible at all. Most Israelis have lost that hope, and its revival is absolutely vital on the way to peace (...)

Let's start with what I consider to be a false debate. First: "Hatred is a very bad advisor" writes Uri, and I will be the last to disagree with him. I know also that he will agree with me if I add that, in our political context, hatred is understandable. Second: "Israel is not South Africa". Of course it isn't, and every concrete reality is different from the other. Nevertheless, these two countries have some similarities: both are racist states with (different kinds of) apartheid systems (the literal meaning of apartheid being "structural separation"). Both countries were established as "European states" in a national/ethical environment composed of non-European who were considered as a hostile environment, and rightly so.

We do also agree - and this is even more important - that in order to achieve substantial results in our struggle, we need to build a joint dynamics including the Palestinian national resistance, the Israeli anti-occupation forces and the

international solidarity movement. Ten years ago, I call it "the winning triangle".

A lot in common indeed until comes Uri's misrepresentation of his political opponents: "(They) have despaired of the Israelis". If it would have been so, why those Israeli BDS campaigners would spare so much of their time in building, together with Uri Avnery, an Israeli movement against war, occupation and colonization? The true debate is not between those who aim to "change the Israeli society" and those who don't, but how and for what.

The political **goal** of Uri Avnery is "an Israeli-Palestinian peace", i.e. a compromise that should satisfy the majority of the two communities, on a symmetrical basis (in another important article, he called it "truth against truth"). Such symmetry is the result of another important political assumption by Avnery: the conflict in Palestine is a conflict between two national movements with equal legitimacy.

Many supporters of the BDS campaign disagree on both assumptions: our goal is not peace as such, because "peace" in itself doesn't mean anything (almost every war in modern history was initiated under the pretext of achieving peace). Peace is always the reflection of relation of forces when one side cannot impose to the other all what he considers being its legitimate rights.

Unlike Uri, our **goal** is the fulfillment of certain values like: basic individual and collective rights, end of domination and oppression, decolonization, equality, and as-much-justice-as-possible. In that framework, we obviously may support "peace initiatives" that can reduce the level of violence and/or achieve a certain amount of rights. In our strategy, however, this support to peace initiatives is not a goal in itself but merely a means to achieve the mentioned-above values and rights.

That difference about "peace" and "justice" is connected to the divergence concerning the second assumption of Uri Avnery, the symmetry between two equally

legitimate national movements and aspirations.

For us, Zionism is not a national liberation movement but a **colonial movement**, and the State of Israel is and has always been a **settlers' colonial state**. Peace, or, better, justice, cannot be achieved without a total decolonization (one can say de-Zionisation) of the Israeli State; it is a precondition for the fulfillment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians - whether refugees, living under military occupation or second-class citizens of Israel. Whether the final result of that de-colonization will be a "one-state" solution, two democratic states (i.e. not a "Jewish State"), a federation or any other institutional structure is secondary, and will ultimately be decided by the struggle itself and the level of participation of Israelis, if at all.

In that sense, Uri Avnery is wrong when he states that our divergences is about "one state" or "two states". As explained above, the divergence is on rights, decolonization and the principle of full equality. The form of the solution is, in my opinion, irrelevant as long as we are speaking about a solution in which the two peoples are living in freedom (without colonial relationships) and equality.

Another important divergence with Uri Avnery concerns the Israeli psyche and the dialectics between the Palestinian National liberation agenda and the so-call Israeli peace camp. While it is obvious that the Palestinian national movement needs as many Israeli allies as possible to achieve liberation as quick as possible and with as less suffering as possible for both people, one cannot expect the Palestinian movement to wait until Uri and the other Israeli anti-colonialists will convince the majority of the Israeli public opinion. For two reasons: first, because popular national movements do not wait to

fight oppression and colonialism; second, because history has taught us that changes within the colonialist society has always been **the result of the liberation struggle**, and not the other way round: when the price for occupation is becoming too high, more and more people understand that it is not worth to continue it.

Generally speaking, one can say that the Israeli mind is shaped by two realities, or, more accurately, one reality and one perception of reality. The reality shaping the Israeli psyche is the colonial reality of the Israeli existence, the feeling of being surrounded by a hostile environment which, to say the least, feels threaten by the dynamics of Zionist colonization. The other factor shaping Israeli collective mentality is anti-Semitism (real and constructed) strengthen by the experience of the Nazi judeocide.

Like any other people, the Israelis want to be accepted, loved even. They have, however a double difficulty: to pay the needed price for this acceptance, i.e. behaving in a civilized manner, and to trust the other in his attempt to normalize relations with them.

Yes, a hand extended for co-existence is needed, but **together** with an iron fist fighting for rights and freedom. The failure of the Oslo process confirms a very old lesson of history: any attempt for reconciliation **before** the fulfillment of rights strengthens the continuation of the colonial domination relationship. Without a price to be paid, why should the Israelis stop colonization, why should they risk a deep internal crisis?

This is where the BDS campaign is so relevant: it offers an international framework to act in order to help the Palestinian people achieving its legitimate rights, both on the institutional level (states and international institutions) and the civil society's one. On the one hand it is

addressed to the international community, asking it to **sanction** a State that is systematically violating international law, UN resolutions, the Geneva Conventions and signed agreements; on the other hand, it is addressed to the international civil society to act, as individuals as well as social movements (trade-unions, parties, local councils, popular associations etc) to boycott goods, official representatives, institutions etc. that represent the colonial State of Israel.

Both tasks (boycott and sanctions) will eventually be a pressure of the Israeli people, pushing it to understand that occupation and colonization have a price, that violating the international rules may, sooner or later, made the State of Israel a paria-country, not welcomed in the civilized community of nations. Like South Africa in the last decades of apartheid. In that sense, and unlike Uri's claim, BDS is addressed to the Israeli public and, right now, is the only way to provoke a change in its attitude towards occupation/colonization. If one compares it to the anti-apartheid BDS campaign that took twenty years to start bearing real fruits, one cannot but be surprised how efficient the anti-Israeli occupation campaign has already been, and even in Israel we can already witness its first effects.

The BDS campaign was initiated by a broad coalition of Palestinian political and social movements. No Israeli who claims to support the national rights of the Palestinian people can, decently, turns it back to that campaign: after having claimed for years that "armed struggle is not the way", it will be outrageous that this strategy too will be disqualified by those Israeli activists. On the contrary, we have all together to join "Boycott from within" in order to provide an Israeli backup to that Palestinian initiative. It is the minimum we can do, it is the minimum we should do.

A systematic biography of Ernest Mandel

10 October 2009, by Michael Löwy



Michael Löwy

The author is a Dutch historian – the first edition of the book came out in 2007 in Antwerp in Dutch – who has based his research not only on a vast bibliography, but also on a large number of personal interviews with former friends and comrades, and above all, on the material provided by Mandel’s personal archives. It is a work of great quality, combining the rigour of the historian, an obvious sympathy for the personality, and a lucid critical distance which prevents any apologist drift.

The chapters of the book are arranged partly chronologically and partly thematically. Born in Frankfurt am Main in 1923 to a family of (non-practising) Polish Jews of German cultural background living in Antwerp (Belgium), the young Ezra (later Ernest) discovered socialism at the age of thirteen by reading Victor Hugo’s “Les Misérables”! Subsequently he observed: “My political ideas were then constituted, definitively, for the rest of my life”. His leftist father, Henri Mandel grew closer to German refugee Trotskyist circles in Belgium after the Moscow trials. In 1938 Ezra, then aged 15, joined the PSR (Parti Socialiste Révolutionnaire – Revolutionary Socialist Party), the Belgian section of the Fourth International. Undeterred by the war and the Nazi occupation of Belgium, he joined the resistance and was arrested for the first time in January 1943, profiting from a lapse of attention on the part of his jailers to escape.

A regular contributor to the clandestine German language newspaper “Das Freie Wort” (“Free Speech”), aimed at German soldiers, here is what he wrote in September 1943: “The Nazi criminal assassins are

in the process of exterminating hundreds of thousands of innocent and abandoned men, women and children, considering these Poles, Russians and Jews as “sub-human”... Civilised humanity cannot tolerate this! Each of you, German soldiers, is complicit if he does not protest against these crimes and prefer to remain silent. None of you can hide behind arguments like “obedience to orders” or “the duty of the soldier”... Your task is to stop the Nazi bestiality: mad dogs must be chained!” Imprisoned again in March 1944, deported to Germany, transported from one camp to another, he escaped again, in July 1944, but was recaptured a little after and was only freed in March 1945 by the US army. Mandel’s inveterate optimism – sometimes accompanied by a certain blindness – was reflected, according to a subsequent testimony, in his attitude at the time of his deportation: “I was happy to be deported to Germany, because I would be at the centre of the German revolution”! This obstinate faith in the German revolution – inherited from classical Marxism – would never be abandoned, up until 1990.

In 1944-46 Ernest Mandel was convinced of the imminence of the European revolution: capitalism had reached its final phase of death agony, as Trotsky had put it so well in 1938. It was only little by little that he would grudgingly accept the reality of the ebbing of the revolutionary wave.

Following the orientation of “entryism sui generis” adopted by the Fourth International, he joined the Belgian Socialist Party in 1951, keeping his identity as a Trotskyist leader secret (his brilliant articles in the press of the International were written under the pseudonym “E. Germain”). In 1956 he founded the weekly “La Gauche”, with the support of the trades unionist André Renard and the old socialist leader Camille Huysmans; among the collaborators were Pierre Naville,

Maurice Nadeau, Ralph Miliband, Lelio Basso and Ignazio Silone. The periodical had a real influence on the socialist and trade union left in Belgium by inspiring a debate on anti-capitalist “structural reforms”. The Belgian general strike of winter 1960-61 – considered by Cornelius Castoriadis as “the most significant event of the workers’ movement after the war” – was analysed by Mandel as the precursor of a future radicalisation of struggles in Europe. The banning of “La Gauche” by the Socialist Party in 1964 obliged him to leave it and create the Union de la Gauche Socialiste, which had little success.

Parallel to his Belgian activity, “E. Germain” plunged himself into theoretical work – his first significant book, “Marxist Economic Theory” (1962), was an attempt, rare at this time, to economic theory with history. He was active in the internal struggles of the Fourth International, supporting – with a certain critical distance – the theses of Michel Pablo: faced with the “coming war”, entryism in the mass workers’ parties, Communist or Socialist according to the country, was necessary. The attempt to impose entry into the Communist Party on the French section, in an authoritarian manner, led to a split in France, and subsequently in the International. Discreet in his comments, Stutje, does not hide his astonishment: “Why such excessive centralism? Why the coercion?” In his opinion, “Germain” preferred to sacrifice his own opinion to maintain unity with Pablo. Only in 1963, following a friendly meeting between Mandel and James P. Cannon, the old leader of the US SWP, was the unity of the International restored (in part, at least). During the Congress of reunification (in 1963) “Germain” presented a thesis on the three sectors of the world revolution – the proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, the

colonial revolution, the political revolution in the countries of the East - which broke with the Third Worldism of Pablo, based in Algiers since 1962.

That does not mean that Mandel was not interested in the Third World and in particular Latin America. In 1964 he was invited to Cuba, where he met Che Guevara and drew up a response to the theses of Charles Bettelheim, in defence of central planning against "market mechanisms" and the predominance of the law of value. A second planned meeting with Guevara, at the request of the latter during his visit to Algiers in 1965, fell through. When Mandel visited Cuba again in 1967, Che had already left for Bolivia. At the announcement of his death Mandel rendered homage to "a great friend, an exemplary comrade, a heroic militant".

In May 1968 Mandel was in Paris and participated, on the night of May 10, in the construction of the barricades of rue Gay Lussac, at the heart of the Latin Quarter, with his companion Gisela Scholtz (a young activist in the German SDS, who he had married in 1966), and the French comrades of the JCR (Alain Krivine, Daniel Bensaïd, Henri Weber, Pierre Rousset, Janette Habel) as well as a Latin American visitor: Roberto Santucho, principal leader of the PRT, the Argentine section of the Fourth International.

A little afterwards, in 1969, the 9th Congress of the Fourth International decided by a majority resolution, supported by Mandel, to adopt a strategy of armed struggle in Latin America. Stutje wonders if, once again, Mandel had not sacrificed his personal opinion for the sake of unity, this time with the youth of the French Ligue Communiste and the Latin Americans, favourable to the new course. Having been present at this event, I do not share this analysis (it is true that from 1974 Mandel took his distances from the illusions of this strategy. I remember an informal discussion with him during the 10th World Congress, where I defended the "political-military" orientation of our comrades in the "Red Faction of the PRT" - expelled by Santucho for Trotskyism - while Ernest considered them doomed to defeat. Of course, he was right)/.

Through these years Mandel produced some of his most important books: "The formation of the economic thought of Karl Marx" (1967) and "Late Capitalism" (1972). The latter is perhaps his most influential book, despite the absence, regretted by several of his friends, of a synthetic view, beyond the brilliant chapters on different aspects of contemporary capitalism. Other important writings of this period include the debate on Trotsky with Nicolas Krassó in the pages of *New Left Review* which greatly contributed to attracting its editors to revolutionary Marxism and "Long Waves of Capitalist Development, A Marxist interpretation" (1980) based on prestigious lectures made at Cambridge University.

Mandel's influence on the rebel youth was at its highest point and he was banned from entering five countries, including France, the USA and Germany. The German interior minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher said in relation to the ban: "Professor Mandel not only supports the doctrine of permanent revolution in his teaching but works actively for the latter". Karola and Ernst Bloch - the well known German Marxist philosopher - close friends of Ernest and Gisela, wrote to him at this time: "You must really be a giant if they have such fear of you! You are the number one enemy of the dominant classes". It should be said that the ban did not stop him from entering France clandestinely on several occasions, as in 1971, when he made a memorable speech before 20,000 people at a meeting of the Fourth International at Père Lachaise cemetery at the centenary of the Paris Commune.

The death of his friend Rudi Dutschke in 1979, and above all that of his companion Gisela in 1982, were hard personal blows. Stutje does not hide his criticisms of Mandel's inability to communicate with Gisela and help her face her emotional crisis. One year later he married Anne Sprimont, thirty years his junior, whose firmness and independence of spirit would be a great aid to him. At this time most of the leaders of the new generation of the Fourth International were convinced that the cycle opened by

May 68 was over, notably after the defeats of the left in Portugal and Spain, but Mandel found it hard to accept this new reality: during the 11th World Congress (1979) he had promised that the next congress would take place in a liberated Barcelona

Mandel always wanted to be a historian - it was Michel Pablo who convinced him to concern himself with political economy - but it was only in 1986 that he finally published his first historical work: "The Meaning of the Second World War". While undoubtedly an innovative and intelligent work, I do not think that it takes into account the specificity of the Final Solution. It was only after having been criticised on this point that he published in 1990 an important essay which he included in the German edition of his book on the "Material, social and ideological premises of the Nazi genocide".

Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR would revive great hopes in Mandel and the expectancy of an imminent "political revolution"; the possibility of a restoration of capitalism was not taken into account. His enthusiasm would be still greater during the big demonstrations of November 1989 in East Berlin which would lead to the fall of the wall, which he witnessed. He believed that it was the renewal of the German revolution, vanquished by the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg, and in any case the "biggest movement in Europe since May 1968, if not since the Spanish Revolution". He would be disillusioned after 1990, with German reunification and the re-establishment of capitalism in the East.

Despite the disenchantment, Mandel would again publish some significant books: "Power and Money, A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy" (Verso, London 1991), an analysis of the social origins of bureaucracy, and "Trotsky as alternative" (Verso, 1995), both of which recognised the legitimacy of Rosa Luxemburg's criticisms of the Bolsheviks and the "substitutionist" drift of Trotsky in 1920-21. During his final years, Mandel replaced the classic dilemma "socialism or barbarism" by the apocalyptic one of "socialism or death"; capitalism was

leading towards the destruction of humanity through nuclear war or ecological destruction. Unlike Stutje, I do not think this amounted to a "fanatical messianism" but rather a lucid appreciation of the dangers.

Stutje observes, correctly, that Mandel had a tendency to separate body and spirit, and led a very unhealthy lifestyle: too much food, no exercise. After a heart attack in 1993, he had to reduce his activities; he nonetheless agreed "against the advice of his friends" to participate in a debate in New York in November 1994 with a "Trotskyist" sect, the Spartacist League, which specialised in attacks on the Fourth International, and he published a lengthy response to their diatribes. Stutje cites a letter

which I sent to Ernest at this time: "This obscure American sect will only remain in the memory of the workers' movement because of your polemic". His last political appearance was at the 14th Congress of the Fourth International in June 1995. A little afterward, in July, he died of a new heart attack. His funeral ceremony, held in September in Père-Lachaise, attracted a great number of people from across the world.

In his conclusion, Stutje pays homage to the exceptional intellectual and literary qualities of Ernest Mandel, and his limitless confidence in human creativity and solidarity. He quotes my own comments on his "anthropological optimism", his confidence in the ability of human beings to resist

injustice. But the biography does not take into account, it seems to me, my following remark: the optimism of the will was not always compensated, in him, by the pessimism of the mind (See M. Löwy, "Ernest Mandel's Revolutionary Humanism" in "The Legacy of Ernest Mandel", edited by Gilbert Achcar, Verso, 1999).

In any case, we can conclude with the author of this fine work that Mandel will remain an example for future generations, through his obstinate rejection of fatalism and resignation.

* *Jan Willem Stutje, "Ernest Mandel: A Rebel's Dream Deferred", London 2009, Verso, (translated by Christopher Beck and Peter Drucker), 392 pages.*

Social democracy punished

10 October 2009, by **François Sabado, Jan Malewski**

The SPD, after having followed a policy of dismantling of historic social entitlements from 1998 to 2005 and after having committed armed forces to a foreign intervention (Kosovo) in violation of the German Constitution, for which it had already suffered an electoral sanction, in 2005 entered a "grand coalition" government with the CDU-CSU, led by Angela Merkel (CDU). It is paying for it now. According to a poll, voters who had abandoned the SPD at this election chose abstention (1.6 million), preferred the original to the copy by voting for the CDU (620,000), or opted for organisations of the opposition (780,000 voting for Die Linke and 710,000 for the Greens, out of government since 2004).

Having won an absolute majority in Parliament in 2005, the Portuguese PS continued and deepened the policy of anti-social counter-reforms begun by José Manuel Durão Barroso (of the centrist PSD). Faced with crisis, the PS government chose to bail out the bankers instead of establishing a public banking policy. It dismantled

the Labour Code to facilitate dismissals and generalised job insecurity, while unemployment has according to official figures gone above 500,000, with nearly half of that number having no unemployment benefit. It has begun the counter reform of teaching and waged an open war against the civil service as no preceding government had dared to do. The socialist electorate massively opted for abstention (which reached a record 39.46% of those registered to vote), but also turned to the left (above all the Left Bloc) and the right (the free market CDS-PP).

Breakthrough of the radical left

The decline of social democracy has carved out an electoral space for the organisations of the radical left, Die Linke (The Left) and Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc, BE).

Die Linke "fruit of the merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, originating from the former East

German state party) and the Work and Social Justice Electoral Alternative (WASG, founded by social democrats and trade unionists disappointed by the policies of the SPD government as well as by revolutionary left and social movement activists) "made significant progress, obtaining 11.9% and 76 deputies (8.7% and 54 in September 2005). For the first time, it passed the 5% threshold in all the western Länder (federal states), obtaining an average of 8.3% in the former Federal Republic of Germany (and 26.4% in the former East Germany). It centered its campaign on the "reconstitution of the social state", in particular for the minimum wage at 10 Euros per hour, and for the withdrawal of the German army from Afghanistan. It also registered good scores in the two regional elections on September 27, in the Länder of Brandenburg (ex GDR, 27.2%) and Schleswig-Holstein (former FRG, 6.0 %), after having already broken through at the regional elections of August 30, 2009 (21.3% in Saarland, former FRG, as well as in two Länder of the former GDR: 20.6% in Saxony

and 27.4% in Thuringia).

The results for Die Linke reflect elements of social resistance in the face of neoliberal policies and a polarisation to the left of a part of the electorate, the trade union movement and the social movements. The conjuncture of the economic crisis and the crisis of the traditional parties effectively opens a space on the radical left, but this situation also raises political debates on orientation in Die Linke. The party is divided. Its majority seeks an institutional insertion and, as has already happened in the Berlin Land, would wish to administer the crisis of capitalism in alliance with the SPD. Oskar Lafontaine has not abandoned the idea of governing the Saarland in alliance with the SPD and the Greens. Such alliances would also be arithmetically possible in Thuringia, Brandenburg or Saxony-Anhalt. They would open the way to a veritable integration of Die Linke in governmental politics in Germany, realising the aspirations of those who, nostalgic for the East German party state, find that the quarantine to which they have been subjected has lasted long enough.

Paradoxically the success of Die Linke could thus accelerate the polarisation between old and new left. The anti-capitalist wing is a minority. To face the dangers ahead, they should not only be capable of defending the gains of their party – the demand for Germany's withdrawal from NATO, which remains a barrier to the integration of their party – but also formulating an alternative orientation in the coming struggles.

In Portugal, on the contrary, it is the new radical left, clearly anti-capitalist, which progresses. Emerging from the alliance between three anti-capitalist forces (The Popular Democratic Union, of Maoist origin, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, Portuguese section of the Fourth International, and Política XXI, a current which has broken to the left from the CP) the Bloco de Esquerda recorded a historic success. With 557,091 votes (9.85%), against 364,430 (6.35%) in 2005, it doubled its parliamentary representation (16 deputies). But above all it obtained a

real national representation, with deputies not only in Lisbon, Porto and Setúbal, but also in Aveiro, Braga, Coimbra, Faro, Leiria and Santarém. It became the fourth biggest party nationally, ahead of the PCP (which, with 446,172 votes – 7.88% – was up by 14,163 votes in relation to 2005 and obtained 15 deputies, up by one). This success should help the Bloco to also improve its results in the local elections which are to take place on October 11.

To the question posed, notably in the last days of the electoral campaign, of possible agreements of parliamentary majority or government, between the Bloco and the Portuguese PS, the response of Francisco Louça has been clear. It can be summed up in three letters – "Nao" (No). This position is an example and a point of support for the whole European anti-capitalist left in the coming political battles.

Evoking the future after the announcement of the results, Francisco Louça, coordinator of the BE, announced three immediate priorities. "The first is social aid for the unemployed to whom José Sócrates (PS prime minister) has withdrawn unemployment benefit. A strong left will be in a better position to fight against job insecurity and for the abrogation of the new Labour Code" he said. The second is to put an end to the current evaluation of teachers. "The PS will cry victory despite the loss of its absolute majority and of many votes. But today Maria de Lurdes Rodrigues (outgoing education minister) has lost her seat. We have stood up for education, we will continue to do so." The third priority of the Bloco is a tax on big fortunes to finance the convergence of pensions with the minimum wage and for the full pension after 40 years of work. With the historic strengthening of the Bloco, "nothing will be as it was before" said Louça. "The BE is an alternative left, a left of combat, which sanctions the arrogance and absolutism of the absolute majority of the PS... we are in the opposition against the new privatisations announced, like that of the airports, in the opposition against the destruction of public services, in the opposition against the destruction of the national

health sector" he concluded.

Commenting on these results, Alda Sousa, former BE deputy, writes: "In Parliament, the Bloco and the CP together have 31 deputies, representing 18% of the votes. Never has there been such a result to the left of the PS. In the minority in Parliament, the PS would be obliged to choose to pass the proposals of the left – like those we will present and which stem from our programme and our mandate – or ally with the reactionary right in the form of the PP. The political framework is more polarised. The political and social struggles will grow in the coming months. They can count on the Bloco, which is stronger than ever."

Political instability

If the successes of the radical left are bearers of hope, the governments emerging from these elections will be bourgeois governments, aggressive towards wage earners, whose policies will seek to raise the rate of profit at all costs. The bourgeoisie and its administrators – whether social democrats, like José Sócrates, or Christian Democrats like Angela Merkel – in no way envisage a "Keynesian turn" in their policies. They seek on the contrary to "restore profitability" and in this goal to increase the exploitation of labour. Hence they will only read from the electoral results the fact that, even if their parties suffered losses – the German Christian Democrats lost votes, in particular in Bavaria, like the PSP – they came first this time and can continue to govern. They can count on the small right wing parties which have been revived by a period in opposition – the CDS-PP in Portugal or the FDP in Germany – whose old refrains ("less taxes", "less state") appear as the new ideas after years of social democratic governments.

The rising stars of the radical left, in the south and north of Europe, must shine very brightly to remain visible faced with the apparent luminosity of the big dead or dying stars.

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