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Greek elections

Greece, anti-capitalism and us – for a “stone in the shoe” strategy

- Debate - Perspectives in Greece -

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The situation in Greece shows there is no third way possible between neoliberal policies and a radical anti-capitalist alternative. Any will to seriously contest the neoliberal order leads inevitably to the necessity of relying on social mobilisation so as to implement a set of measures to break the resistance of the dominant class. Schematically, these measures are organised around seven major axes:

1. Against the blackmail of the “markets”, a moratorium on the repayment and servicing of the debt. A citizens’ audit of the public debt. Repudiation of illegitimate and odious debt. Return to the public fold of sectors privatised in the context of neoliberal policies;
2. Against social inequality: a radical reduction in income disparities, a ban on bonuses and “golden parachutes”, fixing of a maximum income for company directors. Redistribution of wealth through an increase in wages and social benefits as well as a fiscal reform taxing capital and the rich. Control of prices, indexing of wages and benefits;
3. Against unemployment and insecurity: radical reduction of working time without loss of income, with compensatory hiring and reduction of work rhythms. Requisition of unoccupied housing. Revival and extension of the public sector axised on the satisfaction of social (housing, teaching, public transport, health, child care and care for dependent persons) and environmental needs. Generalisation of open ended contracts. Pensions at 60. A ban on layoffs.
4. Against sexism, racism and xenophobia: equality and individualisation of rights for all, whatever their nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Voting rights and freedom of circulation for foreigners. Self-organisation and self defence against the far right gangs. Free abortion and contraception. Separation of Church and State;
5. Against the dictatorship of finance: a ban on speculative funds and the securitisation of receivables, control over capital movements and taxation of financial transactions. A ban on short sales, suppression of tax havens. Reform of the status of the ECB. Nationalisation of the banks and other credit institutions without indemnities or buyout, except for small shareholders;
6. Against the stranglehold of the fossil fuel industry lobbies: nationalisation of the energy sector; a public plan of transition to an efficient energy system, decentralised and based on renewables and local organic agriculture; suppression of useless and harmful production with reconversion of workers;
7. Against neoliberal despotism: a right to civil disobedience; revocability of elected representatives and reduction of their pay; possibility of repeal of laws by popularly initiated referendums; extension of trade union representation and rights; workers’ control; extension of possibilities of control and popular participation.

Transitional Programme

This seven point alternative provides a bridge between the current situation and another mode of production and consumption, based on the satisfaction of needs democratically determined with respect for ecological limits. For reasons that we will not explain here, the LCR-SAP bases its politics on the conviction that this mode of eco-socialist production is indispensable and urgent to meet the gigantic social and environmental challenges with

which humanity is confronted as a result of two centuries of capitalist development. It amounts then to a “transitional programme” towards another society, which can only be global. The struggle for this programme must take account of the following elements:

1. The programme forms a coherent whole determined by the objective situation. Only taking into account the most immediately “realisable” or “comprehensible” elements would be to rob it of its function as “bridge”, its transitional character. So as not to fall into an abstract revolutionism, it is however legitimate and necessary to insist more on certain demands which broad layers of the population can grasp at a given moment. In the current situation in Greece, that entails putting at the centre of the agitation: a) the repudiation of the debt, b) the nationalisation of the banks and c) the cancellation of the memorandums imposed by the troika. It should be done without isolating these parts from the whole and without distorting them. A pedagogic approach is justified – for example, the intermediary demands for a moratorium and audit allowing the maturing of consciousness on debt cancellation – but we cannot cut everything into slices in this way. In particular, the need to nationalise the credit sector cannot be replaced by the demand for a public pole exposed to the competition of the private banks, as Syriza demands. Each situation is specific but, in a general manner, it is about searching for points of rupture, pushing the mobilisations across the red lines of the system. That implies a political leadership which can keep focused on the way in which the different demands can serve to initiate, and then broaden, an anti-capitalist dynamic.

2. Social mobilisation is both the objective and the determinant factor of this approach. It puts on the agenda the self-organisation of the struggles, on the one hand, and the struggle for political power on the other. The two go together and the art of a “transitional” approach consists in making them lead to a situation of “dual power” or in other words a situation where a dominant class leadership is de facto contested by democratic organs set up by the exploited and oppressed in the course of their struggle. A pre-revolutionary situation which can develop into a revolutionary situation. It is obvious that we are not there in Greece. In spite of the very broad discontent concretised in the movement of the indignant and twelve days of general strike in two years, the country has not been shaken by a wave of self-organisation. Given the relative exhaustion of the social struggles since February (perhaps temporary) and the electoral conjuncture, the question of power is posed today under the form of the aspiration to a government supported by a parliamentary majority to pursue a different politics. This aspiration is legitimate but could favour parliamentarist illusions which would inevitably lead back to the social democratic logic of “small steps” and the “lesser evil”. To avoid this trap, it is decisive to maintain a line of rupture around three key axes – the debt, the banks and austerity. During the three days during which it was presiding over negotiations for a possible government, the Syriza leadership situated itself short of this line, even if its concessions were insufficient to convince its potential partners.

The EU question

3. The realisation of the transitional programme sketched above is not possible in a national framework or in the current supranational context. It implies both the destruction of the European Union – because the EU is by nature a neoliberal and despotic war machine, which is not reformable – AND the construction of “another Europe” - because the degree of integration between the economies is such that the national fallback constitutes more than ever a dead end. The democratic construction of a Europe of solidarity and cooperation (through for example a constituent assembly) constitutes then an eighth axis of the programme. The destruction of the EU is obviously a given but it does not follow in our view that the anti-capitalist forces in Greece (or any other country) should demand exit from the Euro, or indeed exit from the Union. For three reasons:

a) This demand carries the not insignificant risk of a confusion with nationalist forces who represent a threat to the workers’ movement;

b) An exit from the Euro would have the immediate result of a heavy devaluation and new attacks from the “markets” and it is not at all sure that this new regression would stimulate combativeness;

c) What matters today is not whether Greece will leave the Euro but whether the peoples of Europe accept the policy being inflicted today in Greece, and which will tomorrow be inflicted in other countries, with negative consequences for all.

4. We argue then for a strategy of “the stone in the shoe”: to call on the people to fundamentally oppose the policies and despotic functioning of the EU, so as to deepen its crisis, while calling on the workers of the other countries to enter into battle. This is not an easy strategy. A first difficulty is that the forces which are not firmly anti-capitalist could retreat “in the name of staying in the Euro or the EU”. (This risk is present in Greece in the form of some of the positions taken by Syriza members, but a line of exit from the EU does not guard against social democratic concessions). Another difficulty results from the great differences of level and rhythm of the class struggle between the countries. These differences stem in part from the deficiencies of the European Trade Union Confederation but they are nonetheless real. One should then introduce the hypothesis that a country which breaks with neoliberalism remains isolated for some time and should take provisions to protect its measures of rupture, while hoping that its calls for the international extension of the struggle will meet an echo. If they do not, it is probable that the troublemaker will be expelled from the Euro or the EU. One will then face a scenario of isolation. Nonetheless, from the viewpoint of the internationalist awakening of the peoples of Europe, the expulsion suffered seems to us preferable to the demand for a deliberate exit, because the latter seems to negate in advance the possibility of a common struggle. It is not about speculating but rather starting from the note that the “Greek crisis” - in reality the crisis of the banks (German, French, Belgian and so on) who gambled with the securities of the Greek debt – contributes to putting the EU in crisis and confronts the trade union movement of the different countries with a strategic choice:

– either to continue to accompany the construction of the EU in the hope of salvaging the social dialogue – which would imply letting the troika strangle the Greek people... followed by the others.

– or else join the Greek workers in the struggle against austerity – which would imply deepening the crisis of the EU and putting its replacement by another Europe on the agenda.

In conclusion

1. In our view, the priority task is to contribute to breaking the isolation of the Greek people. To do this, we defend the broadest, most unitary and most active solidarity against social regression and the diktats of the troika. We develop this solidarity in the perspective of a common struggle against austerity throughout Europe, without subordinating it to any partisan strategy. The interests of the workers of Europe demand that the plans of the troika are defeated by the working class, women and youth of Greece, regardless of whether this or that political current is inspired by SYRIZA, the KKE or ANTARSYA.

2. Our second task is to use the Greek situation to show the possibility and above all the necessity of building a new left political force. There is no “Syriza recipe” which can be applied to produce everywhere the left of the left which the social movements cruelly lack, but some lessons deserve to be drawn. First, here as elsewhere, the PS and SP.a claim that the left is weak and divided. Indeed, with around 25% of the votes to the left of social democracy and the greens at the elections of May 6, the Greek example shows that, if it remained organised in PASOK, the Greek left would be dead. Second, we should note the impasse into which Stalinist sectarianism and dogmatism, incarnated in Greece by the KKE, have led, in spite of the latter’s rootedness in the working class. The great merit of Syriza is to

have salvaged the left and recreated a hope by presenting itself at a mass scale as a unitary alternative to social liberalism. That has earned it the hatred of the media, the governments and the Commission. We are alongside Syriza and other Greek left organisations against these campaigns of demonization. After beating PASOK, we hope that tomorrow Syriza will beat New Democracy.

3. Our third task is to advance the project of an anti-capitalist rupture. From this viewpoint we are critical of Syriza and in solidarity with the anti-capitalist forces grouped in Antarsya (with whom we have nonetheless a strategic debate on exit from the Euro), notably the Greek section of the Fourth International. In spite of the significant differences between Syriza and the French Front de Gauche (the context, of course, but also the relationship with social democracy and the attitude to nationalism, notably), there is a certain resemblance of the two formations. In our opinion, the programme of Syriza cannot be characterised as anti-capitalist and its strategy relies too much on elections and parliament. History shows that in numerous cases political forces have evolved to the left well beyond what might have been initially imagined. It is already the case to a certain extent with Syriza inasmuch as the dominant component of this coalition, Synaspismos, had approved the Maastricht Treaty. We would desire the continuation of this evolution and favour it, but this will depend mainly on the level of combativeness and mobilisation of the exploited and oppressed, in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. We do not rely on defeat and “betrayal foretold” but we are conscious of the road to be covered and the pitfalls with which is sown. On this road, it is useful and necessary that a clearly anti-capitalist, feminist, internationalist and eco-socialist force is organised to make its voice heard in full independence and without sectarianism. The concrete forms and modalities (whether or not to be a component of the Syriza coalition, or call for a vote for Syriza on June 17) are tactical questions to be settled by anti-capitalists in Greece.

The Secretariat of the National Directorate of the LCR-SAP (Sunday June 10, 2012)