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Greece

Reasons for the right's anticipated defeat

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Parliamentary elections will take place in Greece on October 4th. They had been planned for September 2010, but the pressure to have them early has become stronger in recent months. While the economic situation has led to sharper anti-worker measures, the right wing government of Kostas Karamanlis has been weakened by setbacks, of which the most visible was that of the June European elections (its vote was 32.3 %, against 43% in 2004). It only has a one seat majority in the current parliament!

The discourse of the 'modernist right' (New Democracy) in 2004 is very distant now. The ND now cynically follows the same neoliberal policy as the rest of Europe. Consequences: privatisation (the Olympiaki air line, destabilisation of the OSE train company so as to throw it to the sharks and so on), redundancies (suppression of jobs, estimated at 100,000 for 2009). And this with the tools of the hard right: repression (after the killing of the youth Alexis Grigoropoulos in December 2008, the police have continued to hit and gas youth and workers) and racism (anti-immigrant roundups have intensified in recent months). And yet, there has been a triple setback:

1- in relation to the criteria of capitalist Europe: the deficit remains above 3%, and the current slowing up (a poor tourist season) renders the objective of a growth of 1.1% ridiculous.

2- free play has been given to the far right on the terrain of racism, where it is organising anti-immigrant committees, including in the popular neighbourhoods, under the benevolent gaze of the police. Result: in the European elections, the LAOS party went from 4.1 to 7.2, and for the parliamentary elections (3.80 in 2007), this racist party is polling from 5 to 7%. The far right has its head up then, and it would be dangerous to underestimate it.

3- But above all, even if it is in retreat since the youth revolt of December 2008, resistance is an everyday event in every sector (farmers, port workers, cleaners, textile workers and so on). A recent indication: despite the right wing character of the new leadership of the university teachers' union (POSDEP), the latter has threatened the government with a hot autumn if it lets private universities open. For fear of an explosion before the elections, Karamanlis has halted the procedures of accreditation.

Finally, the last days of August showed the impact of these policies: after 80 deaths from fire in summer 2007, a large area has just been burned down in the region north-east of Athens. Against evidence of lack of coordination between forest wardens and fire services, the lack of anti-fire investment, the allowing of construction in forbidden areas, the government spokesperson explained that it was due to there being too many pines! In such conditions, Karamanlis preferred to bring the elections forward: even if it sharpens the divisions in his camp, he is taking the risk of losing now to strengthen himself in opposition, calculating that a tough policy demands strengthened cohesion, with still tougher means.

The most probable outcome is a victory for PASOK (the Greek Socialist Party): after its victory in the European elections (36.6%, 34% in 2004), the current key issue for them is, more than its score (the polls give it from 30 to 35%), whether it will have a majority of seats (151) or not. If not, either it can form a coalition government, hardly likely in this phase, or there will be new elections. Certainly, despite the leftist language of recent times, with the "threat" of higher taxes on bank profits, Giorgos Papandreou has no such intentions and has not equipped himself with the resources to take on the big employers (reduction of contributions for companies which invest and so on). The question is whether the national union leaderships with a pro-PASOK majority will be in a position to stifle the struggles which will break out.

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Of course, this question relates to the political landscape to the left of PASOK. The KKE (Greek CP) has sunk into sectarian self-affirmation, whereas at the European elections its vote fell (8.4% against 9.5 in 2004). As for Syriza, a regroupment of the reformist Synaspismos with some small far left groups, its poor results in the European elections (down from 3 MEPS to 1, with 4.7 % against 4.2 in 2004 but 5.2 for Syn in 1999) have led to a deep crisis; it is falling again in the polls (3 to 4 %) and its objective has been reduced to getting into parliament (there is a threshold of 3 %).

If the perspective in this period is of course to build an anti-capitalist left in Greece, it should be said that the Antarsya regroupment, despite its base in the struggles and the certainty of an active campaign, will have little impact centrally, but that does not prevent it being the basis on which to advance. That would be made easier if this campaign develops around the three following axes:

1- to work towards the construction of an anti-capitalist left, by trying to make Antarsya and the radical groups of Syriza work together, despite their different trajectories.

2- to fight against any truce in the struggles, by stressing the fact that the social struggles are the decisive weapon of the workers (there are significant demonstrations in Salonika on September 5th).

3- and in this context, to promote the unitary form of struggle represented by the united front, the sole means of fighting decisively against the virus of division, a practice which is unfortunately widespread in Greece and has provided much service to the bourgeoisie (3 demonstrations at the same time in Thessalonica, for example) !