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Greece

Syriza's victory seen by a dockworker, union leader from the Port of Piraeus

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Following the collapse of the Greek economy, the memorandum with the troika included a provision to sell off profitable state-owned companies to pay back loans to foreign lenders, resulting in the partial privatization of the Port of Piraeus, Greece's largest port, where Chinese state-owned shipping company COSCO now holds the concession for two container terminals. Since that time, dockworkers have waged a militant and sustained struggle, with strong local alliances in Piraeus and international support from dockworkers around Europe, to return the port to full public ownership and improve the poor working conditions at the privatized COSCO terminals.

Gorgos Gogos is a Greek dockworker and union leader from the Port of Piraeus. A member of SYRIZA, he is active at the regional and union levels of the party and is engaged in local organizing efforts in Piraeus, the large urban industrial area surrounding the port outside of Athens. Katy Fox-Hodess is a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley writing her dissertation on international solidarity among dockworkers' unions. She spoke with Gogos on January 31 following the recent election in Greece

Katy Fox-Hodess: How have people in your community reacted to the election results?

Gorgos Gogos: Generally, it was accepted with great enthusiasm by many people, not only by those who voted for SYRIZA but other people who traditionally belonged to other parties and couldn't escape from those commitments. Everybody I think was saying, ok, let's see what this new route is like and we have to try, somehow, a new way of approaching the whole problem.

K: When you say other parties, you mean PASOK and the Communist Party?

G: PASOK and New Democracy, mostly. From the Communist Party, anyway, I don't have many acquaintances, but I think that people who don't belong to the structure of the party, who are not members of the party, accept this election result with relief. In the beginning, we can say there was a negative reaction, they were questioning the possibility of co-governing with ANEL, the Independent Greeks, that is actually a populist right-wing party, though all of their discourse is actually quite anti-Troika, anti-memorandum. But I think after the formation of the new government, the new elected government, many people realize that there is going to have to be cooperation within the government. The new government has been quite coherent and we have the first announcements from several ministers confirming to the people that the main guidelines of the pre-election program are going to be implemented at once.

K: What has the reaction been in the port?

G: In the port, we were really happy, especially after hearing the first announcements by the new Minister of Maritime Affairs. He reaffirmed that the privatization process of all ports, but especially the Port of Piraeus and the Port of Thessaloniki, will stop.

K: One of the first announcements SYRIZA made after the election was about stopping the

pri-va-ti-za-tion of the ports. Why do you think SYRIZA has made this such a pri-or-ity and why is it impor-tant to fight for pub-lic ports?

G: You know we are say-ing in the port that every-one who was against the dock-work-ers in Piraeus port lost power, lost the gov-ern-ment, they were elim-i-nated, so don't fight against us. Ok, so this is a very macho expla-na-tion, it's not polit-i-cal. For SYRIZA, pri-va-ti-za-tion in gen-eral is some-thing that's not accept-able. The pri-va-ti-za-tion that was going on very, very quickly was the pri-va-ti-za-tion of the ports, and espe-cially the Port of Piraeus. So I think that it was sym-bolic, and at the same time, an impor-tant mes-sage, that we're not going to pri-va-tize. And of course, it's very impor-tant that Piraeus port work-ers and dock-work-ers have shown their deter-mi-na-tion, their devo-tion to defend the pub-lic port.

First of all, it's a strate-gic point for a coun-try such as Greece, not only because of the many islands that con-nect the peo-ple liv-ing there and trav-el-ing there, not only because it's the main gate of ingo-ing and out-go-ing cargo and goods. It's also because when a state-owned com-pany passes to pri-vate investors, the pri-vate investors care only for their prof-its and noth-ing else. So the people's trans-porta-tion needs will not be served. Apart from this, it affects the soci-ety and the econ-omy in gen-eral. It was and it will be prof-itable. It didn't have losses in any year over the past fifty years. And a gov-ern-ment like SYRIZA needs prof-itable pub-lic enti-ties so as to redis-tribute the pub-lic wealth. Apart from this, our jobs would be lost, our labor rights and the orga-ni-za-tion of our job would be chal-lenged and in dan-ger, and it's affect-ing our fam-i-lies, so we are fight-ing also for our jobs and for our children.

K: Are you opti-mistic that SYRIZA will be suc-cess-ful in this process of con-fronting COSCO and the troika and stop-ping the process of port privatizations?

G: SYRIZA will be strong only if they will remain com-mit-ated to the pre-elections program. In addi-tion to this, they need the sup-port of the peo-ple and soci-ety. For exam-ple, of course we are sure that they are going to have pres-sure from abroad, from China and from the Euro-pean Union and from the troika and from mem-ber states in Europe. But all this pres-sure will be less effec-tive if peo-ple stand with the deci-sions of the gov-ern-ment. One of the first things that Alexis Tsipras said yesterday to [Eurogroup Chair] Dijsselbloem was that he wants to do things differently than the peo-ple who were in power before him. He said he wants to fol-low the com-mit-ments that he made to the peo-ple. It's impor-tant to hear that from a leader, the Prime Min-is-ter, to say that he will fol-low the pro-gram that he showed to the peo-ple and was voted for. This way, they can-not reverse their plans or in case they have to reverse their plans, they will have to ask for the opin-ion of the peo-ple and the soci-ety first.

I have trust in my com-rades in SYRIZA. And I have trust not only that they will be account-able but that they will fol-low what they have been say-ing. I have trust that they have received the mes-sage from soci-ety, which says go do what you have told us you will do. Of course, we know that as a union, we have our auton-omy, we are not going to fol-low some-thing that a mem-ber of SYRIZA says or a min-is-ter of SYRIZA says – we have a very healthy coop-er-a-tion and an hon-est one.

K: Is it impor-tant for the union and for the coali-tion in Piraeus to con-tinue to orga-nize and be mobi-lized to pro-vide pres-sure from below for SYRIZA to keep its promises?

G: Of course. Orga-ni-za-tion and mobi-liza-tion of the union in gen-eral, and espe-cially in a sec-tor like ours, is a neces-sity and a pre-con-di-tion for any-thing you want to do at any time. No mat-ter which party's in power, no mat-ter what the deci-sions are. Until now, all the deci-sions have been neg-a-tive for the unions – it's the first time in Greece we face some-thing pro-labor, anti-privatization and so on. But we still want to be mobi-lized. We don't want peo-ple to remain on their couches, but instead we want to be on alert in order to

promote our demands so that they will not disappoint us. And we want to promote our demands and the decisions of the government that the European Union or other countries do not accept and are pressuring the Greek government to back down on. And already we have started to have this discussion among ourselves. Everybody was happy all this week, it was the first time we were laughing after the announcement of the new government, but at the same time, or the next day, we were starting to talk about it, to say, now we have a government that says no to privatization, but in case they are pressured by Europe to sacrifice the ports, what are we going to do? We're going to stand outside of the door of the Maritime Affairs Ministry and our port, and we will continue our fight.

K: The same day that SYRIZA announced it would stop the port privatization process, they also announced that they would rehire the cleaners from the Ministry of Finance and thousands of people who were illegally fired from the public sector. What is the significance of prioritizing these decisions?

G: It's very symbolic, first of all, because this group of women were very militant, very active, and very much present in every struggle taking place in Athens. So it's very symbolic and a very good example, not in all senses because they made certain mistakes in my opinion, and we have some others who can say a lot of things, but they still remain like heroes. But I don't like to use the word hero because you put a hero over there and you forget him and you are doing bullshit on the other side. So they're people like us, they were women like us and they were very devoted to their struggle. So it's very important for SYRIZA to support them and to solve their problem. It encourages other unions to be this devoted.

K: What is the significance of the election for workers and unions in Greece in general?

G: It's the highest moment of democracy. This is a moment in which all of us are called to choose who is going to represent us and support and defend our rights and our positions. We are not afraid of elections. On the contrary, I think Greek people should be asked more frequently. For example, it is constitutionally permissible to have referendums, so I think the new government will use this process and will mobilize people in this way to be participants and not an audience. This is important. It needs time. It's not a matter that will change in one or two or five years. But if a left government can remain powerful for more than five years, for two government cycles, and build strong foundations, it will change the mentality as citizens. We believe in this because as a trade union, we use elections frequently, we have collective decision making processes.

K: Do you believe SYRIZA will prioritize reversing the anti-labor legislation of the last government, which targeted collective bargaining and unions?

G: It's one of the first things they say they are going to cure. They are going to reverse all of these negative laws which prevented collective bargaining and return all the laws that were protective to the less powerful part of the market, which is labor and not the employers. It's a commitment and I think it's one of the first laws they are going to reverse.

K: What is your opinion on the alliance between SYRIZA and ANEL?

G: In the beginning, I was quite skeptical. But the majority of 149 MP's gives them the opportunity to have a role in this government. Greek society in general is not so progressive. A big percentage of Greek society is quite conservative, not only in its way of thinking, in its way of acting, but in its way

of approach-ing sev-eral issues, for exam-ple, sex-ual ori-en-ta-tion or human rights con-cern-ing immi-grants. These are issues that many Greek peo-ple are not in favor of. They are quite con-ser-v-a-tive. The vast major-ity of Greek peo-ple are not so reli-gious, but quite attached to the tra-di-tion con-nected to the Ortho-dox church. The oath that the new Prime Min-is-ter, Tsipras, gave was polit-i-cal, with respect to the leader of the Greek church, say-ing that I'm going to give a polit-i-cal oath but also I want your good wishes for this gov-ern-ment to go on. It sends a mes-sage. So you need a con-ser-v-a-tive party that can sup-port you in this strug-gle, in the com-mon fight against the mem-o-ran-dum poli-cies, and after that, I think the Greek peo-ple will real-ize that rec-og-niz-ing, for exam-ple, the mar-riage between LGBT peo-ple, it's not cru-cial, you're not going to be affected, you're not going to be infected, it's a human right. So you are more pow-er-ful hav-ing a conservative party in this and hav-ing already some time, a year, six months in power, and hav-ing shown that you believe in what you are say-ing and you fight for it and you want to imple-ment it. It's impor-tant to have a con-ser-v-a-tive audi-ence in such a gov-ern-ment so as to trans-mit some ideas. It's more clever, let's say, to have them inside, and hon-est, in the sense that you can say to them, for exam-ple, ok guys, we have a prob-lem with some thou-sands of kids that are born here in Greece, their parents were cit-i-zens of other coun-tries and they have no cit-i-zen-ship, but they are Greeks, they are brought up here, they have been taught in Greek schools, they are our children's friends, so we should give them cit-i-zen-ship, they are Greek people.

K: So you are say-ing that hav-ing ANEL in the coal-i-tion forces SYRIZA to try to speak to and con-vince peo-ple on the right?

G: Yes, Yes. And I think it's the best vehi-cle to min-i-mize con-ser-vatism in Greece. Maybe what I'm say-ing is too roman-tic and has no polit-i-cal expla-na-tion, but it's my per-sonal impres-sion. I've seen this in my union. Some con-ser-v-a-tive peo-ple have seen mem-bers of our union, left guys, who are com-mit-ted and hard-working, and through their exam-ple, they are per-suaded that no mat-ter if you left wing or right wing, when some-body is fight-ing for some-thing that is right, and if they trust you more and they are con-vinced but you voted for SYRIZA, it's ok. If you want to make bread, you put in flour and water and you mix it together and after that you have bread. This process I think will take place in the gov-ern-ment and will be expanded to society.

K: Is there not a risk that SYRIZA will move to the right?

G: No, not from ANEL. I don't think there is this dan-ger from ANEL being inside the gov-ern-ment. If we will have this move, it will be from other agents out-side of the govern-ment, more pow-er-ful play-ers in this game, the state or big cap-i-tal-ists – the whole sys-tem, let's say. But not from ANEL.

K: What are the biggest chal-lenges or pres-sures SYRIZA will face to push its agenda?

G: First of all, if we leave the case of the port and pri-va-ti-za-tions and all of that, this anti-privatization pol-icy will be the vehi-cle for the troika to press us. For exam-ple, if you don't fol-low our pro-gram, we'll stop your liq-uid-ity. The first thing they have to do is address the debt cri-sis at the Euro-pean level. It's not easy. There are sev-eral arti-cles this week, for exam-ple, about how Prime Min-is-ters Mar-i-ano Rajoy in Spain and Pedro Pas-sos Coelho in Por-tu-gal, reject this pro-posal. They say it will be dam-ag-ing for all of us and the mar-kets will pun-ish us, just like what Anto-nis Sama-ras, the for-mer Prime Min-is-ter, would say, for exam-ple. But I think that if this cause is taken up by the peo-ple and the Euro-pean social demo-c-ra-tic par-ties that still have some sig-nif-i-cant part of left dis-course in them, I think that more alliances and more allies will be found. This is the first thing. Because the debt is not only stran-gling us, it's also press-ing more healthy economies. Ger-many itself has such prob-lems. It's not obvi-ous now, but sooner or later it will come.

And on the other hand, for inter-national affairs, I think they should start giving signs that the citizens are the priority, not the companies. They should start, for example, as I said, by amending labor laws, and also making changes in the health and education system, and making a serious effort to tax big wealth. These will be signs to society and to the poorest part of the society that something has changed, that they're not the same as the others, that the rich are not untouchable and the rest of us will not be fucked over once again.

K: Do you believe that the coalition with ANEL will last?

G: I don't know. It's a big question mark. I don't think that this form of government will last much time. I don't know if it's going to be one year or two years but I don't think it will last for four years. They are going to face serious challenges in the near future. I put a deadline, let's say, in the summer, when we're going to face the first serious problem in paying back some of the debt. If we don't have any alternative resources for paying this money, I think we will have new elections. So SYRIZA has until that time to show to the people what the direction is, that it's different than the previous government, so they will reaffirm, maybe with better results, the new government. Actually, I wouldn't like to see this coalition last for four years. I would like to see the left party get more powerful through this coalition in order to have a light at the end of the tunnel soon and to go to elections again with a greater percentage for SYRIZA, so it has an absolute majority.

K: To support SYRIZA, in general, what should workers and unions in Greece be doing?

G: They should be more active and respond to the calls for dialogue. There is a commitment from SYRIZA's side that no decision will be taken without a dialogue between the government and the affected or interested parties. So first of all we have to be working harder to have proposals, so as to have something to say and not to simply say no or yes with obedience, but to continue to be critical. On the other hand, we have to start processes, procedures, and initiatives in order to realize we are not the only ones with a problem, but next to us there are also people with more problems or less problems. This way we can have horizontal and vertical relations with other adjacent institutions.

It's not difficult for this to happen, especially in Piraeus, because we have the labor center. Unfortunately, the power rests with the Communist Party link in trade unionism, and they're not so cooperative. They not only have certain structures and discourses, but they follow certain directives from the party. And their intention is to get more power for the party instead of developing a more coherent program and becoming closer to private workers. I think we have a lot of work ahead of us if we want to be constructive and if we want to expand the idea of solidarity and co-action. I think the days of each sector fighting on their own are over. It's not effective anymore. And in case SYRIZA does not do well and loses power, a more conservative government will certainly come to power. So we need to make the most of this time, not only to change things for the better, but in case we have negative results, to be more prepared to face the conservatism that will come for sure. But this is the pessimistic view. We have a more optimistic view, to be constructive, draw up proposals, and make our self-criticism – why we didn't succeed as trade unions before, what things have to be changed within the structures and the processes to be more democratic and less clientelistic. We have a lot to do.

K: How is the relationship between SYRIZA and the labor unions? Are there strong ties?

G: No, they don't have strong connections because actually within the trade union structures, SYRIZA's percentages are the same as they were five years ago. So people from SYRIZA in trade unions are in the minority. Although society has changed, due to clientelism, personal connections, and all these rotten systems, democratic ways of breathing are not allowed. So SYRIZA in power is in a better position to

put these processes in the front and center. But I don't know how big the resistance will be, especially from the Communist side. Because, unfortunately, the Communist Party is part of this clientelism and has especially non-democratic ways of holding power within the unions. I've heard terrible stories, and I know they're not just stories, about how unions that belong to the Communist party use very undemocratic means to keep their power.

K: In other words, the principle problem is the structure of the unions – they are clientelistic and not very democratic – which makes it difficult for SYRIZA to gain a foothold in the unions?

G: They were very close to the parties that were in power. SYRIZA must not fall into the trap of using their power in government to sow the same seeds in this field. It must leave the trade unions alone to change themselves.

K: One criticism of SYRIZA is that the party is dominated by university intellectuals, not people from the union movement – do you share this view?

G: It is more or less true. But as I told you, the problem is that people in the unions who are members of SYRIZA are few in number. And to be honest, personally speaking, I don't promote myself in SYRIZA as a trade unionist and in my trade union as a member of SYRIZA. They are two different roles. I try to distinguish and behave according to where I am. Of course, between these two roles, the priority for me is to be a dockworker and to protect as much as I can the rights of my colleagues and my job. But apart from this, I need some political tools to make this happen. I think there will be fewer university guys and more trade unionists over time. But also I have to tell you that trade unionism in Greece is quite devalued.

K: There is a negative opinion of trade unions?

G: Yes, because of the very big connection between the parties of New Democracy and PASOK with the trade unions. I think I told you before that many presidents of the Confederation of Greek Workers, after the end of their term, became ministers, without explaining or having any process open to the people or open to the unions. It was just a very personal decision, passing from one role to the other. So all these behaviors created problems and people were leaving the unions. What we're trying to do in our union is to fight this. Of course we have few things in common with such behaviors. On the contrary, we have very open approaches, we try to mobilize people, we try to involve new members and young members in decision making in the union, so while we might not be one of the best, I think we have a very good approach to this. And we think that unionism is a tool to have common demands and to fight for our common demands. It should not be seen as only a step for one person to become more powerful or more dominant. Whoever holds these positions has to serve for the good of everybody, not to serve their personal interests.

K: The Piraeus B electoral district near the port had among the strongest support for SYRIZA in the elections in 2012 and in 2015. Why has there been such strong support there?

G: Generally, in the poorest areas, SYRIZA got the biggest percentages. The vote was quite class oriented. In Piraeus, and in the wider area of Piraeus, I think the seriousness of the approach of SYRIZA, the sincere intervention, you know, all the activities of the last three years, have awarded SYRIZA with this percentage of the vote.

K: You have been very active in organizing with the party in Piraeus. What kinds of activities has SYRIZA been involved in there?

G: Soli-dar-ity for All in Piraeus, an organiza-tion sup-ported mainly by SYRIZA, serves daily meals. There are also the "soli-dar-ity lessons", free classes for stu-dents who can-not afford to have pri-vate lessons for the uni-ver-sity exams, as well as social phar-ma-cies and social doc-tors, check-ing peo-ple for free and pre-scrib-ing and so on. These are imme-di-ate actions for the soci-ety done with-out check-ing people's sta-tus, unlike Golden Dawn. Every vul-ner-a-ble per-son is accepted. It's a healthy inter-ven-tion in soci-ety. Of course we are try-ing to tell peo-ple that they should mobi-lize and collectively demand their rights. But it's not to make them be a mem-ber of SYRIZA or to work for SYRIZA and so on.

There is also a coor-di-nat-ing body of anti-fascists in Piraeus and we are in it. We don't have our own cam-paigns. We try to sup-port the com-mon strug-gles, the anti-fascist strug-gles. On the con-trary, the Com-mu-nist Party is unfor-tu-nately out of this, with their own inter-ven-tion, which is very low, I have to tell you. They don't make fre-quent protests, and so on, although they were a tar-get and they are still a tar-get of fas-cists. But they are very afraid to get involved in a com-mon strug-gle. On the other hand, we have very good rela-tions with peo-ple from ANTARSYA, espe-cially in anti-fascist strug-gles, despite our dif-fer-ences. I don't think there is an anti-fascist move-ment or man-i-fes-ta-tion, in Piraeus at least, that we do not par-tic-i-pate in.

K: sup-ort for Golden Dawn is less than it was one, two, or three years ago. Why do you think this is?

G: In my opin-ion, they should be even less pow-er-ful, they should lose more than 5% of the per-cent-age. Unfor-tu-nately, they kept 6.5% or some-thing like this. It's a big per-cent-age if you con-sider that their lead-er-ship is in prison, that they don't have the finan-cial resources they used to have, and, most impor-tantly, that it is now pub-licly well-known that they are engaged in crim-i-nal activ-i-ties. So it's an unfor-tu-nate result and it's quite painful to have 6,000 or so of your neigh-bors vote for Golden Dawn. I expect from SYRIZA first of all to put them on trial, to give them a fair trial, and at the same time, from the per-spec-tive of being in gov-ern-ment, to pro-mote anti-fascism and anti-racism so as to start chang-ing the men-tal-ity of those peo-ple who are now vot-ing for Golden Dawn, to change their ori-en-ta-tion and to be clear with soci-ety about their crim-i-nal face.

K: As a union leader and a SYRIZA mem-ber, when you speak to mem-bers of your own union or to work-ers in Piraeus in gen-eral who aren't mem-bers or sup-ort-ers of SYRIZA, what kinds of argu-ments do peo-ple make and how do you respond and try to orga-nize them?

G: First of all, they are afraid that they are going to act like the pre-vi-ous gov-ern-ments. They say now that they are not going to pri-va-tize the port and finally they will do it. So these are the main argu-ments I hear. What I say hon-estly is that I don't believe they will do it, but in case they are pres-sured or they change their mind, I'm sure that they are going to fight from a bet-ter posi-tion. We are going to have for sure a more demo-cra-tic gov-ern-ment. I'm cer-tain we are going to take part in an open dialogue, and any-way, not only our abil-ity to fight but our respon-si-bil-ity to fight is here. And we are going to be against any-one, even if it's SYRIZA in power, who undermines our rights and our jobs. It's clear.

K: Are there other strate-gic sec-tors that you would like to see pass to pub-lic ownership?

G: Energy com-pa-nies, for sure, I don't have to men-tion the health sys-tem and educa-tion sys-tem, uni-ver-si-ties, trains and roads, should be taken back from sub-con-trac-tors that have taken a very big amount of money. For exam-ple, I trav-eled to my vil-lage which is 350 km from Athens recently dur-ing the Christ-mas hol-i-days and we paid 45 euros for the tolls, for the roads that were paid to be con-structed by the state. I want to see my dad but I don't want to pay 45 euros to go and see him. So for all these sec-tors, I think they should remain public.

K: What is your opinion of the arguments made by SYRIZA figures like Costas Lapavistas in favor of Greece leaving the Eurozone?

G: Personally, I think the euro as a currency is a means, it's not the objective. It's the means to have an economy. What is an economy? An economy is ok if it serves people and provides a certain level of security to the people – jobs, health systems, education. So in those terms, the euro is a tool. Apart from this, it is a political issue. I would prefer to see what chances we have inside the Eurozone. And after that, for sure inside the European Union, which is something different. And after that if they insist, if they say, you have to keep getting fucked over, you have to be sacrificed so as to remain in the Eurozone, no. I think that if that moment comes, we should go to a referendum and decide altogether. And from Lapavistas' side, I was following him during 2011 and 2012 – for two years, I was following his speeches. I was quite open to hearing such opinions but I was not persuaded that they have a clear answer especially for the first period of a transfer from the euro to a local currency. They didn't convince me that they have something concrete to propose to the people for those first critical six months of transition. And you know, our society is not trained or educated to suffer under such terms. For example, if you leave the euro, the iPhone will be three or four times more expensive. I don't care. I don't give a damn. But many people give a damn about some items that they don't even have the power to buy in euros. So I'm ready to wait for gasoline and to do my part and not to demand more but I know many guys around me that would be happy to simply take their share and their family's share for the month. So I think we're not trained well enough to confront such a danger.

K: There have been some criticisms that SYRIZA has moved toward personalism and is becoming too focused on individual politicians – do you share this view?

G: It's becoming too presidential, yes. That's true. I'm one of these guys that are criticizing Tsipras although I recognize that he is very charismatic, very clever, very efficient. He can represent our core ideas and all this that we call SYRIZA. Unfortunately, the last six months, we have seen that the party procedures were not respected and some decisions were taken with a small group around the president. This is a problem. This is a problem which we have addressed within the organs of the party. It's something that we can't prevent now, now that he is Prime Minister. This kind of thing will happen more and more, I think. But I hope that the collective reactions, the collective interventions will ameliorate this. And of course I'm not saying that he's like Georgios Papanou or Samaras. He's a left guy. And he's not going to act in such a way. But ok, within the left spectrum, he has made some mistakes – not respecting the organs of the party – and he was trying especially during the pre-election period to put things as far back as possible so as to have less collective procedures. I'm also critical of this. But I don't know if it's personal decisions or people surrounding him. For example, there are one or two guys that are not so clever, in my opinion, that don't have such a collective way of acting, though I don't want to minimize his responsibility. I prefer to give responsibility to a team, a party, a union. That's why I'm accusing the team of leadership. It's not just one man.

K: Do you participate in a political current within SYRIZA?

G: I was participating in the meetings of AKO, the Renewing Communist Ecological Left, a Eurocommunist party and one of the founding members of SYRIZA. Inside SYRIZA, AKO, with two smaller groups, created ANASA, which in Greek means breathe. ANASA became an official political current. It doesn't have a structure, there is an open dialogue between ANASA and some guys from the majority of the party, meaning close to Tsipras and close to the president's group. They're critical and they created what is called the Group of Fifty-Three, fifty-three members of the central committee. So this Group of Fifty-Three, it's getting bigger and bigger, it's not fifty-three anymore, it's more. We don't have a very strict structure. Actually it's a group for dialogue that is trying to promote collectivity within the party, trying to prevent factionalism, trying to prevent the leadership from making decisions

without being approved by the collective, and trying to prevent the presidential leadership group from making mistakes and taking decisions out of the hands of the party.

K: What can worker movements in general learn from this experience?

G: This topic we could talk about for some hours. Look, the motto that SYRIZA used during the pre-election period was that hope is coming. So now we feel that hope has come and we think it's a great opportunity for the working class to start breathing. In my personal opinion, it's a period of responsibility for all of us to go beyond ourselves, not to have the first demand be for our union, for ourselves, but to try to develop more collective demands, more fundamental demands, and to start the hard work of positive criticism, of serious impact proposals. Because I think now we are fighting from a better position, but we are still fighting. It doesn't mean that just because we have a very charismatic Prime Minister with good ministers that this is the end of the story, no. I've known these guys for many years. They are guys like ourselves. So I can imagine that if I were in that position how important it could be for me to have the support of the people. I would feel more secure having people back me. Not to follow them and to say yes to everything they say, no, but to support the right decisions, to keep our presence and to keep our signature being active in every decision they take. It's really serious and I feel more responsibility because as General Secretary of the union, it's a lot of work for me to mobilize people, having fulfilled their main demand, meaning that the port is not going to be sold but I want the state to own it. It's difficult. But it's the only way we're going to succeed, knowing that the program is not something revolutionary. It's a clear social democratic program. But in order to achieve a socialist society, we need some time so as to pass through a real social democratic path with socialism as the end goal.

K: What is the significance of the election for workers outside of Greece?

G: I have to tell you that I have received from our friends who are dockworkers in Europe many, many messages, congratulations, very optimistic messages. They are waiting, at least the people I am in contact with, and they are very close to my mentality, they were very happy. And they really want to see this government succeed, because they feel that this will trigger changes in this direction in their countries. I do believe that the governmental change in Greece will have a snowball effect.

K: What can people outside of Greece do to support the political process in Greece?

G: First of all, they should not listen to the mainstream mass media and should try to find alternative information. It's really important. I'm following what the mass media in Germany has been saying these past two or three days and it's really too biased. They are against the new government and they don't tell the truth. The second thing is that they should show their solidarity actively. For example, I know that today (January 31) PODEMOS are having a big manifestation in Madrid, so as to criticize Rajoy for his statements at the European meeting about European debt. These kinds of actions are really encouraging the Greek people and encouraging Greece's new elected government to go on. To Europeans, I have to say that we have to remain together and to remain together as nations, not as companies or as multinationalals. SYRIZA is another Greek experiment. Greece was an experiment in austerity for the past five years and now I think it will be an experiment in prosperity.

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