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Greece

The Apotheosis of Bureaucratic Degeneration

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The 16th party congress of the KKE (CPG - Communist Party of Greece), still by far the biggest left political force of the country, took place on Dec 14-17, 2000. The CPG, taking advantage of the outrage about the bombings of Yugoslavia by NATO, got 8.7% of the vote in the Euro-elections in 1999 and 5.5% in the national elections in 2000, roughly maintaining its position.

At the same time, DIKKI, a supposedly left, nationalist party failed to obtain the necessary 3% to re-enter parliament. SYN, which split from the CPG in 1991 and has become a party with a mild parliamentarian and "Europhile" social-democratic line, managed only with great difficulties to be represented, getting 3.1%. The CPG is not only the biggest left party but also the only parliamentarian force that takes a clear position for the defence of workers' interests against the neo-liberal offensive of the Greek and other EU governments and against the austerity policy supported by both PASOK and the right opposition in favour of the ECU, to which Greece was recently admitted.

The CPG also played an important role in the anti-imperialist mobilisations against the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia, Clinton's visit to Athens and other opportunities, as well as in the mobilisations of the peasants against the agrarian policy of the government and the EU, the school occupations in 1999/2000, the protests against the "reform" of education that makes it much more difficult for students to get a school-leaving qualification and in some defensive struggles of the workers against the onslaught of government and capital.

Nevertheless the influence of the CPG in the trade unions has declined gradually in the last few years and only the union of the construction workers is still under its control. But the whole trade union movement, still largely led by a bureaucracy close to PASOK, is undergoing a sharp decline that nobody would have expected to this extent at the beginning of the 1990s.

So the CPG leadership made certain efforts to show a left profile in order to gain influence among the youth and to correspond to the mood of the party's rank and file. But there's no doubt that the main result of the party congress is the confirmation of the basically right, partially even reactionary, Stalinist-bureaucratic line of the party apparatus, and this, of course, "unanimously". There was virtually no real controversial discussion at the congress and this, even for the CPG, is a novelty.

Return to classic Stalinism

The "unanimity" could be achieved only by the hardest bureaucratic measures against deviant opinions during the preparations for the congress. Trade union leaders Kostopoulos (ex-parliamentarian) and Theonas (Euro-parliamentarian), who had supported the opening of the party to the collaboration with other political forces, were ruthlessly excluded from the party without having the opportunity to present their opinions according to the rules of democracy. Lots of articles were published in the party newspaper Rizospastis that branded the "deviationists" more or less openly as "agents" of the "class enemy". These repulsive methods guaranteed the seemingly total triumph of the leading clique around Papariga, Gontikas and Mailis at the congress. The background of this conflict is the sharpening sectarian line followed by the party leadership in the last few years. This line refers to certain elements of "third period" policy that was the leading orientation of the Comintern in 1928-34, though the classical right line of the "popular front" remains in force.

One has to consider that the party leadership was confronted for the first time after decades with the problem of forming its own point of view on so many difficult and complex issues of international affairs, for example on the end of the "socialist camp" itself. The party leadership "solved" this problem by a big leap back into the good old times of Stalinism, explaining the collapse of the Soviet Union mainly by "revisionist" developments since the 20th congress of the CPSU when Khrushchev denounced Stalin's crimes in a halfhearted way.

The CPG has tried to avoid the process of social-democratisation that virtually all the European CP's underwent, some of them a long time before 1990/91 like the Italian PCI or partially the French PCF, and after 1991 more or less all the former Stalinist parties which had exercised power in Eastern Europe. But the CPG leadership has found no better explanation than old Maoist "theories" and uses now certain elements of allegedly "left" tactics applied in the far-off days of Stalinism. In the political practice of the last few years this meant that the CPG leadership did not even try to build up common fronts of struggle together with other political currents in the trade unions like PASOK or SYN or is even openly opposed to doing so. PAME, the so-called "front of workers' unity" supported by the CPG, doesn't mean anything else but unity of the party with itself and, though not yet applied consistently, the preliminary stage of purely "red" unions of the CPG. What cannot be achieved by these tactics, of course, is a real workers' front against the escalating attacks of the ruling class on their rights and standard of living.

Anti-imperialist rhetoric

In the last years and particularly since the wars in former Yugoslavia broke out, the party propaganda focused on a specific form of "anti-imperialism". The CPG misses no opportunity to blame NATO and the imperialist powers for everything that happens in the Balkans and in the world. The party congress decided to construct an "Anti-imperialist Anti-monopolist Democratic Front" (AADF) as central core of the party's political orientation.

The "solidarity" of the party leadership with the peoples of the Balkans in the 90es was, however, very one-sidedly limited to "friendship with Serbia" which, in fact, consisted of an unconditional support for Milosevic's regime including all its wars and crimes that were committed at the expense of all the other peoples of former Yugoslavia and the Serb people itself. Except Milosevic's regime, all the other governments of the area, like the Albanian, Macedonian ("FYROM") and all the political forces of the Kosovars, were and are "agents" and puppets of NATO imperialism.

With this assessment the CPG leadership manages to avoid any serious analysis of the national and social problems of the peoples and all its wisdom is largely limited to the position that the borders of former Yugoslavia should not have changed and at least be conserved as they are now. In this latter point its position coincides with the viewpoint of the NATO imperialists.

The "AADF" means in practice a codification of the party's "united front" policy with the most backward circles of the right, certain petit bourgeois layers and nationalist intellectuals who instinctively reject some ideological consequences of EU-integration and capitalist "globalisation" and have partially adopted an anti-Western attitude characterized even by hostility towards the Enlightenment. This spectrum includes the extreme and fascist right, the recent church hierarchy led by Athenian archbishop Christodoulos, nationalist circles in PASOK and "New Democracy" as well as in smaller parties and even parts of the so-called extreme left and groups of Trotskyist origin which in fact have surrendered to a particularly aggressive version of Greek nationalism - in the name of "anti-imperialism", of course. The CPG leadership has recently tightened its links with these circles and nationalist journalist Liana Kanelli was elected as member of parliament for the CPG last year.

"Patriotism" and nationalism

Criticizing the economic policy of the government, one of the principal accusations of the CPG leadership is the "sell-out" of the national economy to the interests of European monopoly capital. As far as foreign politics are concerned, an important component of the party's criticism is the alleged policy of abandonment to Turkish "expansionism" under the pressure of US imperialism. This concerns mainly Cyprus and the Aegean Sea. The CPG supported the deployment of Russian S-300 missiles in Cyprus (which were deployed in Crete finally) and in this way more armament in the divided island. As general secretary Pappariga said in a TV interview years ago, the CPG supports defence of the fatherland "tooth and nail" showing by this how far the party is away from its ideological origins in the early 20s when it was strongly opposed to the wars of the Greek establishment and the communists resisted Greek imperialism as they said at that time.

The recent CPG leadership argues that Turkey is particularly aggressive and is supported by international imperialism. From this point of view, the huge armament programs and the enormous money Greece spends every year for this purpose are simply measures for the defence of "national independence and sovereignty". The "patriotic" viewpoint of the CPG leadership is rather illogical, however, since it also blames the Greek governments for their subordination under the dictates of the big imperialist powers in NATO and EU. But why should we support a government and an army of such a state in the event of war? Is Greece more underdeveloped or colonial than Turkey?

The CPG leadership is strictly against buying weapon systems from NATO countries and suggests instead further construction of the "national" armament industry. As the case of the S-300 missiles shows, it has no objections to buying weapons in Russia.

Last year archbishop Christodoulos mobilized ten thousands of people against the intention of the government to abolish the recording of religious denominations on ID cards. This ID record was originally introduced by the Nazi occupation authorities in order to find out who was Jewish. It means a clear discrimination against minorities that are not "Greek orthodox", i.e. "reliable citizens" but belong to potentially "dangerous" sections of the population like the Turks (so-called Muslims) and Pomaks in Thrace but also Catholics and others. The CPG leadership took a "neutral" stand on this conflict and contented itself with stating that both sides were trying to distract the attention of the people from their actual problems.

During the last 10 years, since the borders to the Eastern European countries were opened, a deep transformation process of the Greek working class has taken place. Hundreds of thousands of "illegal" immigrants, mainly Albanians but also many from other Eastern European countries, Asia and Africa, virtually all of them without political rights, without social security or trade union protection, are today a constant component of the most oppressed layers of the working class, particularly in agriculture. The more or less "illegal" immigrants are estimated to constitute some 15-20% of the work force today. The official police terror against these absolutely underprivileged people but also the rise of racism combined with nationalist tendencies in broader layers of the population have become everyday reality. The "Theses" of the party's CC presented to the party congress, a text of 48 pages, have literally nothing to say about all these problems.

The theses of the CC

The "Theses" of the CC are entitled: "Struggle has a prospect - with a strong CPG - Popular Front". The terms "popular power" and "popular economy" dominate in the important chapter on the "AADF". It is the task of the AADF to struggle for the realization of these two goals and "to take a firm stand for the international orientation of the country, for the development of new ways concerning collaboration in trade and economy, to break at the same time with the imperialist blocs (that means EU and NATO) and to oppose them, in a world that will not only be ruled by imperialist domination but also by the strengthening tendencies of confrontation, independence and emancipation."

(Thesis 20) Therefore the CPG aims for stronger economic collaboration not only with countries it considers to be still "socialist" (China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba) but also with other countries that follow an "anti-imperialist" line (whatever that means) like Milosevic's Serbia and Russia. This perspective, however, seems to exist only in the imagination of the CPG leadership.

How can the suggestions of the CC and the goals of the AADF be implemented in reality? Thesis 20 explains that " a revolutionary government (...) as power of the working class and its allies" could be created in "a revolutionary situation". But in the following section it says: "Under the conditions of class confrontations and decline of the influence of the bourgeois parties and their allies while the conditions for a radical overthrow and revolutionary transition have not yet developed, a government of anti-imperialist, anti-monopolist forces can emerge on the basis of parliament."

So it's quite obvious that the CPG leadership, despite its recourses to tactical elements of the "third period" and despite its "left" and anti-imperialist" rhetoric, remains trapped in the logic of class collaboration and the classical version of the popular front. The goals of "anti-monopolism" and "anti-imperialism" can be achieved without breaking with the institutions of the bourgeois state and the capitalist profit system altogether! This world of true democracy of middle class employers and shop owners can become reality if Greece cuts its links with EU and NATO. This means an important theoretical achievement: 10 years after the collapse of "real socialism", "socialist camp" and, in the final analysis, of Stalin's reactionary idea of "socialism in one country", the CPG leadership discovers the possibility of a "non-monopolist", petit bourgeois democracy in one capitalist country (or some capitalist countries).

The theses actually do not offer important elements of an analysis of the international situation or the conditions in Greece from a Marxist viewpoint but "mediocrity, intellectual indolence, detestation of theory, open contempt and vulgarisation of scientific and theoretical research are being promoted. (...) There is no serious analysis of the most important contemporary contradictions but it is simply stated that they are sharpening as, incidentally, in the last 200 years. No social-economic relations are analysed but simply consequences registered." [1] It's sufficient to appear as the only party that seems actually to resist and that is the real *raison d'être* of the recent party leadership.

"The bureaucratic apparatus of the cadre (...) understands that the resources of the past are not sufficient any more while the old generation with its intensive militant experiences from the time of the 'petrified years' is getting smaller and smaller. The apparatus tries with all its might to find ways to survive and uses by now the instinct of self preservation as guideline." [2]

The weight of the party apparatus

According to Rizospastis "59.1% of the delegates at the party congress were high level and highest level cadre (38.8% members of district committees, 3.8% of the CC and the Central Economic Control Committee, 2.3% parliamentarians). In other words, those who should have accounted to the congress for what they did, were the overwhelming majority at the congress. They want to have their cake and eat it or one and the same person who treats, drinks" [3] as a Greek expression says. 24.2% were members of other regional committees, that means middle party cadre, so that the CPG's rank and file with some 17% was entirely underrepresented.

The political development of the party was characterized by a permanent tendency to the right until the end of the 80s. This tendency reached its climax in 1989 when the CPG formed a coalition government together with the right "New Democracy" in order to overthrow the PASOK government of A. Papandreou and to guarantee a so-called "cleaning" of political life with the help of bourgeois courts. Since 1991 the CPG leadership tried to adopt a left profile without actually breaking away from its deeply reformist daily routine and its parliamentary orientation.

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"Without any critical reassessment of the precedent period of classical 'front'-policy that culminated in the government of Tzanetakis (1989), without any critical approach to the policy of the party when the workers' movement was on the rise after the overthrow of the Junta (1974) but the CPG battled fiercely against the movement of factory and enterprise unions and subordinated the trade union movement to the GSEE bureaucracy, without any reference to the deep changes concerning working conditions which are going on since one million immigrant workers came to Greece in the last ten years, without, finally, any attempt to make a deeper analysis of the reasons for the collapse of the 'socialist' regimes, the party bureaucracy leads the CPG thoughtlessly and only under the dictate of its own narrow interest to survive into a 'leftist' entrenchment of the party's forces." [4]

There is no doubt that the position of the party leadership largely hinders the construction of an actual independent class front against the policy of massive cutbacks of government, capital and EU. The recent orientation of some bigger groups of the non-parliamentarian left like NAR (New Left Current) and SEK (allied with the British SWP) which also tend to a "united front" policy with themselves or a very limited circle of smaller groups leads in the same direction.

The bigger parties of the left like the CPG and SYN are undergoing a deep and continuous crisis but also most organizations of the far left are facing similar problems. The workers' movement as a whole has not yet found a way out of the crisis.

Some left groups, one of them belonging to a left current of SYN, recently presented a project of "reconstruction" of the entire Greek left including all reformist parties and more leftist organizations. To us it seems that this pretension does not correspond with reality and, first of all, neglects to confront the actual tasks concerning the workers' movement and the forces of revolutionary Marxism: the construction of a united workers' front. This can only be achieved if broader layers who follow so far reformist parties including PASOK can be motivated to get involved in the struggle. At the same time, it will be necessary to reinforce the efforts to construct a revolutionary workers party rooted in the working class and based on the methodology of the Transitional Program. This party will have to separate itself clearly from nationalism and all the reformist parties that have led the workers' movement into the recent deep crisis and dangerous impasse.

[1] Dimitris Kazakis: "The 'historical achievements' of the 16th Party Congress of the CPG", in: Spartakos 58, Jan. 2001

[2] Nikos Menegakis: The Popular Front in the version of the 16th Party Congress, in: Spartakos 58

[3] Nikos Sterianos: The apotheosis of bureaucratic degeneration, in: Spartakos 58

[4] N. Menegakis: The Popular Front ..., see above.