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Greece

Fourth International: On 25 January, a turning point for Greece and Europe!

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â€¢ The next weeks will be decisive in Greece and Europe. Behind the electoral battle of 25 January 2015 a conflict between the fundamental classes of the Greek society is being played out, including with a European dimension. This is a fact. If there is a strong defeat of the right parties and a Syriza victory in these parliamentary elections, the fight against the austerity policies could tip over to the side of the people particularly as there is an insistent campaign by EU governments and commissioners for Samaras. The opinion polls give Syriza 28%. To gain an absolute majority, on its own, it needs about 35%. The result might depend on the results of the small lists, which will not be represented in Parliament if they do not obtain 3%. Of course, an electoral victory of the Greek left would not be enough, but it would show that austerity policies can be blocked and the course of the things reversed.

It is one of the weak links of the chain of the austerity policies that could break.

Greece was one of the countries where the neo-liberal capitalist attacks were applied the most brutally: the average income available fell by 35% between 2009 and 2013, unemployment stands at more than 28% – and more than 50% of 15 to 24 year olds, public services have been destroyed, salaried workers and sectors of the petty bourgeoisie have been terribly impoverished. These are the results of the “memorandums” imposed by the troika (the IMF, ECB, EU), which have led to a real regression of the living standards of millions of Greeks. The country has been bled dry, with the active complicity of the ruling classes – and their political representatives, from New Democracy (ND) to PASOK – who appropriated not only the wealth produced by the working masses of Greece (indigenous and migrants), but also the billion euros recycled over the years by the EU in the form “structural aid” to the owners of this Greece. The geostrategic place of Greece in NATO counts for a lot in this reactionary outburst.

â€¢ It is the rejection, by Greek society, of this barbaric policy which has led to the current political crisis. It is one of the key factors which prevented the government of Samaras from winning a majority of 180 members in Parliament to elect a new president of the Republic, former EU commissioner (Stavros Dimas). But the specificity of the Greek crisis is the central role that Syriza occupies, against the right, far right and social democracy represented by the vice-president Evangelos Venizelos. Although in a series of European countries it is the ultra and far right that benefit from the crisis, this is not the case in Greece, with Syriza, and in the Spanish State with Podemos, where these forces polarize resistance to austerity policies at a mass level.

In fact, one cannot understand the Syriza “dynamic” without taking into account the destructive depth of the economic crisis alongside the collapse of one of the pillars of the traditional Greek political system: Pasok – Greek socialist movement, the historic crisis of the right, the drop in support for the KKE (CP) from 13.1% in 1989 to 4.5% in June 2012. An ultra-sectarian KKE, which in an official statement unhesitatingly affirmed in June 2014: “in recent years, Syriza has made a systematic effort to save capitalism in full view of the workers”. This change of the political chessboard is especially the result of a social fightback against the attacks of the ruling classes and the European Union. Nearly 30 days of nation-wide strike, not to mention the partial fights in a large number of sectors have determined the rhythm of the country's social and policy situation in recent years and months. The various components of Syriza, their members in the trade unions – in collaboration, often, with militants of the Antarsya coalition, the student movement, etc are the vectors of these mobilizations. Moreover, the initiatives against the neo-Nazis (Golden Dawn, which has strengthened its presence) and in defence of the rights of migrants and refugees have been continually articulated to the battle against the relentless austerity measures and repression.

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The Greek radical left is the product of the accumulation of all this social and political experience. Its victory is possible, but the game is not over yet.

First, because the right has not said its last word. The Greek right wing remains strong with a social and political base. New Democracy is an ultra-reactionary formation. Central in it are semi-fascists coming from Laos, a far right organization. It has guilty links with the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn and the sectors of the military and police. The spectre of a military coup continues to cast a shadow in the background of Greek political life even if it is not an immediate threat. There is also ranting against the left, workers, migrants. Lastly, let us not forget that the right can enjoy total support from the bulk of Greek bosses, of the European bourgeoisies and of the troika. Its choice is direct confrontation with Syriza and the Greek.

The danger for the European ruling classes today is political. Their goal: to inflict a new defeat on the Greek people. The Greek crisis can have economic consequences on the situation of Europe in the financial, monetary and banking torment, but the most important "risk" is social and political contagion. Greece has a strategic place in Nato's military dispositive, and an open crisis in Greece would have consequences for international power struggles. A defeat of the austerity policies could give back confidence to the millions of workers who have been strongly tested in recent years. It is thus decisive for the European leaders to do everything so that the experiment fails. This popular determination leads certain sections of the European bourgeoisie and elites to indicate the possibility of negotiation with a new Greek government. It is within this framework that the leaders of the EU could use what remains of the traditional liberal or social liberal left: the remains of Pasok, the socialists movement of Papandréou, or the remains of Dimar (left democratic), particularly if the Syriza leadership undertakes the formation of a coalition government which seeks an agreement with EU leaders. The European powers will combine confrontations and manoeuvres, confrontations and pressures to impose a policy, in continuity with the current government, while hoping to force the Syriza leadership to capitulate. Some are already calling it the "Syriza parenthesis".

A lot is at stake today in Syriza, which is at a crossroads. The "presidential office" and Alexis Tsipras – the Syriza leadership – are multiplying contradictory statements: rejection of the troika's "memorandums", stopping paying debt charges, and suppression of most of this debt, but at the same time seeking an agreement with the leaders of the European Union who, in order to continue their loans, demand application of the budget policies, the fall in the Greek people's standard of living, and the destruction of the public services.

At this stage, the dominant theme in Syriza's campaign is the commitments of the Thessalonika programme: restoring wages and pensions to their pre-crisis level; return to the pre-crisis collective agreements; return to a minimum threshold of taxable income to 12,000 euros; suppression of the tax on heating fuel oil. These measures, if they are applied, will have a meaning for the Greek people and further afield in Europe: austerity can be blocked.

This is why this dual discourse will very quickly run up against the policy of the ruling classes, in Greece and Europe: either the diktats of the EU are accepted, and the experiment will be defeated, or one remains faithful to the fight against austerity, while calling for mass mobilization, and there is the possibility of a social rebound. It will be difficult to escape this alternative. "Not one step backwards" is the slogan of the comrades of the "Left platform" in Syriza. And it is what is strongly felt by the active layers of the electorate of Syriza and the masses of young people, unemployed, and trade-union activists in Adedy (public sector) or GSEE (private sector).

For the slogan "Not one step backwards" to take on stronger substance, it must gain support from a unitive policy of the whole of the Greek left, Syriza obviously but also the KKE and Antarsya. Within the KKE, there are increasing doubts about the ultra-sectarian orientation of the leadership. As for Antarsya, it is divided on the possibility of an alliance with a "national communist" current – Alvanos's Plan B. The Greek left wing, Syriza and Antarsya have particular responsibility in building a unitive project, which goes beyond these organizations, but can bring together trade unionists, campaign activists, ecologists.

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These political choices are all the more decisive as the social situation is contradictory. Decline of social mobilizations, since 2013, express fatigue, lack of concrete results, the worries provoked by the need to deal with increasing all-involving precarity. This has not led to lesser politicization but a transfer of the hopes for change, for blocking the daily avalanche of Counter-Reformation, into a change of government incarnated by Syriza.

â€œ The challenge is clear and decisive: it is necessary to defeat the Greek right and far right and to do everything so that the Greek left, of which Syriza is the main component, wins these elections, in order to create a social and political dynamic for a left government, which must strive to bring together all the forces ready to break with the austerity policy and to fight against the pitfalls of chauvinistic nationalism. This government must be a government of the lefts and not a national union government preparing conciliation with the ruling classes and the EU. The rejection of the memorandums, of the budgetary diktats of the EU, the non-repayment of most of the debt, the first measures of an anti-austerity government, are the questions on which the confrontation with the EU will be played out, but they will not be able to be consolidated without a policy which from the outset breaks with all the antisocial attacks on the Greek people in the last four years in the field of wages, health, the right to work and housing; which starts to take anticapitalist measures, of incursion into capitalist property, nationalization of the banks, and certain key sectors of the economy, reorganization of the economy to satisfy elementary social needs. To impose these solutions, social mobilization, workers' control, self-organization and social self-management are essential. Finally the conquest of the government, within a parliamentary framework, can, in exceptional circumstances, be a first step on the path to an anticapitalist rupture but, there too, this one can be confirmed only if one government anti-austerity creates the conditions for a new power being pressed on Popular Assemblies, in the companies, the districts and the cities.

A decisive battle is beginning in Greece, but all the peoples of Europe are concerned. The Greek people should not remain isolated. The fight to put an end to austerity can start in Greece but it will be able to develop only with the mobilization of powerful forces of the labour movement throughout Europe. We must stop the governments of the European Union continuing to impose their diktats, refuse any interference, any blackmail. It is for the people to decide. We must, through the campaigns, the trade union movement and all organizations, build, in all the European countries, a wall of solidarity with the Greek people, against the troika and right-wing policies. It is also the task of revolutionaries to strengthen links with the Greek revolutionary left to support convergence and steps forward in unity. It is our responsibility.

Secretariat of the Bureau of the Fourth International

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