

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4613>



Greece

Gathering the anti-Memorandum left in Greece

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV498 - July 2016 -

Publication date: Wednesday 13 July 2016

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Greece's Popular Unity, the radical left alliance formed last summer after the betrayal of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of SYRIZA in accepting the third "Memorandum" of austerity measures demanded by the European Union blackmailers, held its first party conference last year.

Tsipras' actions came at the culmination of a battle within SYRIZA led by the Left Platform to hold the party leadership accountable for acting against the stated program of SYRIZA from the days after it came to power in January 2015. The Left Platform and other SYRIZA members who rejected Tsipras' capitulation left to become the core of a new alliance, Popular Unity, where they joined by other individuals and organizations from the radical left, including several currents from ANTARSYA, the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left, which had remained outside SYRIZA in the preceding years.

When Tsipras set new elections for September, Popular Unity faced the challenge of organizing its new group, preparing an election campaign and mobilizing supporters to vote in a matter of weeks. In the end, the new alliance fell just short of the 3 percent of the vote necessary to get representatives in the new parliament.

Antonis Davanellos is a leading voice of the socialist group Internationalist Workers Left (DEA) and the Red Network, a former Political Committee member of SYRIZA and leader of the Left Platform, and now a member of Popular Unity's Political Council. Here, he reports on the discussions and outcome of Popular Unity's first conference, in an article translated from Greek into French by Sotiris Siamandouras for the A l'encontre website and translated here into English by Todd Chretien.

Popular Unity celebrated its first national conference in Athens on June 24-26. The meeting brought together an assembly of effective and combative activists whose unity is a critical development on the Greek radical and anti-Memorandum left.

The party numbers some 5,000 members nationwide. Its governing bodies include a Political Council composed of 111 members, who were elected by the 1,009 delegates present at the conference. The large representation of delegates was despite the fact that some faced transportation problems owing to the economic crisis, and had to leave before the end of the conference.

There are three principal currents in Popular Unity's "political front": The largest, with 55 percent of the delegates, was the Left Tendency [whose main spokesperson, Panagiotis Lafazanis, served as Minister of Productive Reconstruction, Environment and Energy in the first SYRIZA-ANEL government before resigning]. The Radical Renovation current won 19.7 percent of the delegates, and the Red Network secured 12.8 percent.

Popular Unity's first conference demonstrated a difference with and other currents on the so-called radical left that orient mainly on participation in elections—as well as those who believe that it is first necessary to "regroup" the left by putting particular emphasis on a political-theoretical evaluation of the SYRIZA period, implying that political action must be postponed to a later time.

During two days of intense political discussion—with all the difficulties that come along with developing procedures

Gathering the anti-Memorandum left in Greece

in founding an organization in such a social and political situation, Popular Unity delegates nevertheless approved a programmatic framework and a political resolution constituting a roadmap for activity for our 180 local and workplace branches.

Of course, these texts are necessarily a compromise between political positions that are, at times, quite far apart. Be that as it may, the great majority of delegates clearly believe these compromises represent progress in the elaboration of a common political outlook.

It could not be otherwise, as Popular Unity is a new alliance—keep in mind that it came together less than a year ago—and there are different tendencies with their own trajectories and political experiences at its heart. A large portion of these emerged from the Left Platform within SYRIZA—which in turn was chiefly composed of the Left Current and Red Network—while another section came from ANTARSYA [the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left] after having drawn conclusions about that coalition's passive, sectarian posture.

Political discussion during the conference centered around a number of crucial questions. Some currents attempted to define the character of Popular Unity as, above all, an "anti-European Union current." This underestimates the need to base our aim of breaking with or leaving the eurozone on the decisive and immediate struggles facing us today against austerity, the Memorandums and neoliberalism.

This underestimation of the need for a clear class content to our opposition to the euro and the EU is linked to an underestimation of the need for an anti-capitalist strategy, which was, in fact, explicitly adopted in the conference decisions. In turn, this is linked to a dismissal of the importance of a general perspective for socialist liberation and emancipation—a reference point that ought to decisively frame all of our politics, placing clear limits on, for example, what we consider acceptable political alliances.

All this points to the need for strategies that delineate a socialist perspective from one that revolves around a perspective based on "national independence."

After all, today's world is not the same as it was during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Imperialism's policies have not imposed "colonization through debt" by gunboat, but rather by force of the banks.

This difference is not only tactical; in a country like Greece, the local ruling class is linked to centers of European imperialism by a thousand threads. This ruling class has thrown its weight behind agreements with the lenders. It has backed up the pro-austerity Memorandums. It has shown no willingness to conduct experiments similar to the "Nasserist" strategy of the past—that is, to countenance any form of limited autonomy from the international "institutions," even if remaining squarely inside the boundaries of a conservative economic model.

This central fact ought to eliminate any basis for strategies based on a perspective of achieving national independence. Instead, the anti-Memorandum reversal of austerity or an exit from the eurozone under a popular-working class program should be a component of an internationalist transitional program toward socialism. Otherwise, it will not come to pass.

This debate underlines differing estimations regarding the meaning of the "Brexit" vote [on the UK referendum on leaving or staying in the EU]. One stance points to Brexit as proof of the crisis of the European Union and the contradictions facing our adversary, and is delighted by it. The other insists on an independent approach, a policy

based on class.

It's one thing to be enthusiastic about the Brexit vote, but it's another thing to underestimate the specific problems of political leadership we find in Britain, let alone the problems that come with searching for a local Greek version of UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farageâ€”never mind granting them some role as "liberator" from the EU.

Our insistence on the definition of Popular Unity's line as being anti-Memorandum/anti-capitalist can continue without difficulty within the framework of the decisions made at the party conference regarding the planning and activity of its organizations and of its local sections.

We decided to take action against proposed reforms to Greek labor law, to resist attacks on the social security system, to fight against privatization and the auctioning off of low-income and working-class housing, and we will organize solidarity with refugees.

At the crucial level of actionâ€”which brings to mind the "French model" of mobilization and the sustained fight against the El Khomri labor law, whose significance was somewhat underestimated in our discussionsâ€”what would a strategy of "national independence" mean?

What would be, for example, the specific content of "defense committees of national sovereignty" proposed by some members of Popular Unity? What would be the content of the proposalsâ€”fortunately put forward by only a very small minority at the conferenceâ€”to "control the borders?"

Anyone who really wants to understand the state of mind of Popular Unity's base only need understand that we are now the first official political party in Greece to affirm our rejection of homophobia, and a large majority passed an amendment backing the right of same-sex couples to adopt children.

We have no illusions that all these political questions are settled. We know the debate will continue, and it will subsequently develop in close coordination with Popular Unity's 180 local and workplace branches. In fact, this is what makes us optimistic about the final outcome of the debate, for we are convinced that a large majority of the party's membership is oriented toward radical left politics.

The discussion of Popular Unity's statutes could not, in the end, be conducted for lack of time. Efforts to achieve the most democratic constitution possible will continue. This debate is closely linked to issues such as the party's growth, the collective functioning of its leadership, and the relationship between the decisions of the "party" and the public statements of its leaders and cadre in the media. All of these questions generated dozens of amendments at the conference, but they will have to be settled going forward.

In our opinion, all of the material generated by the conference should be studied by the newly elected leadership bodies so they can be grouped together clearly by theme. And it will be necessary to convene a party Congress with sufficient time allowed to make decisions, without discord, about statutes and rules governing our party's functioning. In the meantime, we should follow the guidelines we agreed to "in principle" with a sensibility that takes into account the tasks before us.

In the wake of SYRIZA's capitulation and the disintegration of the left, Popular Unity is the critical site for the regroupment of the anti-Memorandum radical left. The conference was a positive step in the right direction, a path we

must follow with determination.

Over the course of the conference, the Red Network demonstrated that it has taken steps toward its own political consolidation and maturity. We elected 14 comrades to Popular Unity's new Political Council, openly stating our willingness to collaborate with other currents, but also making our own ideological and political choices clear.

We have refused to follow the model of creating "blocs" whose only aim is to secure more elected positions in the party's leadership bodies. These sorts of blocs may be useful in this regard, but they carry with them unforeseen contradictions.

July 13

socialistworker.org