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Greece

Toward a government that will break with the Troika?

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On the eve of the elections on May 6, 2012, Germany's Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, called on Greeks to elect a majority "that respects the commitments made to international creditors by the present coalition government" [1]. He was wasting his breath, since more than 65 per cent of Greeks voted against the diktats of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. A new period opened on May 6 in Athens. To discuss it, we interviewed Dimitris Hilaris of the organization OKDE-Spartakos, which is part of the Antarsya coalition.

Dimitris, can you draw a first balance sheet of the vote on May 6?

Dimitris Hilaris: We have to stress three important facts. First, the result on May 6 was a stinging rebuke for the Troika. It was a vote against the austerity imposed on us; it was the culmination of the mobilizations of the last few months. Next, we should underline the fact that, for the first time since the fall of the dictatorship, it was not PASOK which took the majority of the votes of the popular classes, but the forces to the left of social democracy. Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left), the Communist Party and the coalition of the anti-capitalist Left, Antarsya, together won almost 30 per cent of the vote. If we add on the Greens, it was close to 35 per cent. Definitely, there is a change in workers' electoral behaviour.

And the third important fact?

Dimitris Hilaris: It follows from the preceding points. It is the polarization of political life, on the left and on the right. At the moment when the pro-austerity parties are collapsing, it is the radical Left which is polarizing the debates on one side of the political spectrum and it is the Nazis who are successful on the right...

Exactly, they got 7 per cent. That's enormous, isn't it?

Dimitris Hilaris: The 7 per cent is only the Golden Dawn party. We should add to their result the scores of two other smaller parties of the far Right. Yes, there is a radical Left that is emerging, but also a radical Right.

Are the middle classes leaning towards authoritarian solutions?

Dimitris Hilaris: In my opinion, the far Right got its votes from three categories: students who have been influenced by the intervention of the far Right in the universities, a part of the "social" Right which no longer believes in the conservative Right that is in thrall to the Troika, and finally disillusioned voters of PASOK, but also of the Communist Party, the KKE, for whom there is an anti-system logic to voting for the far Right. They won 500,000 votes, but this is not yet a stabilized, loyal electorate.

They will probably lose ground in the elections on 17 June, but it is almost certain that they will get into Parliament, since 3 per cent is enough for that.

Some people have drawn parallels between the present situation in Greece and the Weimar Republic, which was the prelude to the coming to power of Hitler...

Dimitris Hilaris: Comparisons should be made with great caution. We are not emerging today from nearly five years of war. And we are not, contrary to the Germany of the years from 1919 to 1923, in such a disastrous economic situation. And moreover, unlike in that period, there is not in Greece activity by paramilitary groups such as existed in 1919, for example... There is a similar dynamic, but... let's be careful.

And Syriza, the coalition of the radical Left, anti-liberal, founded in 2004?

Dimitris Hilaris: It is the party which has been able to capitalize on the dynamics of the movements that are taking place, which has shattered the hegemony of PASOK and New Democracy party. Syriza has been able to be in step with people. While the KKE offers a prospect of a distant paradise and we, the Antarsya coalition, remain largely propagandistic, Syriza has been able to provide a credible solution to the situation, through the slogan of a left government. At the same time, its responses are often confused: when they are put under pressure, we hear a cacophony from leaders of Syriza. Some claim that they will unilaterally abolish the debt and the agreements with the Troika. Others, more conservative, give priority to staying in Europe. The situation is complicated, but we should approach it without sectarianism.

Which means?

Dimitris Hilaris: We, the coalition of anti-capitalist forces, must participate in this debate. Syriza, which is likely to emerge stronger from the elections on June 17, will probably ally with others to govern. But there is a new fact, the hypothesis of a left government. This question must come down from the leaderships of the parties into the social movement.

There are two conditions for the creation of a left government: firstly a political programme to break with the Troika, a government that cancels the debt and the memoranda, at the risk of being excluded from Europe.

And then, the transfer of power downwards. A left government can only represent the interests of those below only to the extent that those below have power. So what is necessary is a transfer of responsibilities and powers to popular assemblies. This would be the first task of a left government - to convene a national Constituent Assembly of popular assemblies.

Dimitris Hilaris is a member of the leadership of the OKDE-Spartakos (Greek section of the Fourth International) and of the International Committee of the Fourth international. This interview was conducted by Paolo Gilardi and published in L'Anticapitaliste, no. 70, journal of the Anticapitalist Left in Switzerland.

[1] In effect, a call to vote for the centre-left PASOK or the centre-right New Democracy

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