

Greece: A defeat for the right, but now its policies have to be defeated!

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The campaign for the Greek parliamentary elections of October 4, 2009 was without great interest: as always, it was based on a sea of money (the right and far right spent a fortune on advertising posters) and on the monopolisation of the media by the parliamentary parties alone, from LAOS (far right) to Syriza (radical left) and the environmentalists. The first result to note is that on the basis of a rampant crisis, with distrust for the institutional parties offset by relation to the great challenges of the period, abstention is growing in a country where voting remains mandatory in theory.

From a 74% participation rate in the parliamentary elections of 2007, we were down to, respectively, 52.6 % in the European elections of June 2009 (63% in 2004), and 70 % in the elections of October 4, 2009.

And yet the results of these elections are very interesting: firstly for the real slap in the face delivered to the right, much stronger than what the last published polls in mid-September had predicted, and then for the big electoral victory for PASOK, unmatched lately in Europe for social democracy! But a first analysis of results to the left of PASOK is obviously essential to aid understanding of the political situation in a country marked in recent years by great social struggles, including the gigantic youth revolt in December 2008.

Party name	2009 %	2009 Votes	2009 Elected officials	2007 %	2007 Votes	2007 Elected officials
Pasok	43,92 %	3.012.373	160	38,10 %	2.727.279	102
New Democracy	33.48 %	2.295.967	91	41,84 %	2.994.979	152
KKE	7.54 %	517.154	21	8,15 %	583.750	22
LAOS	5.63 %	386.152	15	3,80 %	271.809	10
SYRIZA	4.60 %	315.627	13	5,04 %	361.101	14
Green environmentalists	2.53 %	173.449	0	1,05 %	75.502	0

Renaissance Democratic (nationalist right)	0.45 %	30.856	0	0,80 %	57.167	0
ANTARSYA [1]	0.36 %	24.737	0	0,32 %	22.447	0

A PASOK tidal wave

Some compare the results for PASOK to 1981, when for the first time in its history, Greece elected a left Government without any pre-emptive coup d'état. The comparison is exaggerated, but the results are impressive: while in September 2007, Greece saw almost all areas dominated by right, that is exactly the opposite of what occurred this time. PASOK, credited with 39 to 41 % in the polls, got 43.92% of the vote against 38.10% in 2007 and 36.6% in the 2009 European elections. Traditionally right wing regions went over to PASOK, like Florina, in the North, where it won a majority for the first time. And above all, whereas the question in mid-September was whether it would win the 151 seats necessary to govern alone, it won 160.

Of course governments have for decades been shared in Greece between the right wing party and PASOK, directed moreover by a few large families (Papandreou, Karamanlis, Mitsotakis and others). But this fixation on the "two party system" characteristic of the KKE (the Greek CP) or SYRIZA (the radical left around Synapismos) hides two indisputable facts: the first is that even in 2007, left parties were in the majority in Greece, and this situation should have encouraged united front frameworks to better combat a right that was in reality in the minority. Which was never done, largely on the pretext of combating the two party system. Secondly, PASOK has a significant popular base, as can be seen in the trade unions and as shown by its results in the popular neighbourhoods (44.2%) in Egaleo, where the KKE got 13.1%, Syriza 6.8%; 45.7% in Kamatero, with 13.1% for the KKE, 5.2% for Syriza; 43.7% in Peristeri with 13.4% for the KKE and 6.5% for Syriza). At the national level, it got 39% of the votes of private sector employees (11% for the KKE and 8% for Syriza) and 47% of those in the public sector (7% each for the KKE and Syriza). And if one considers regions based on the criterion of poverty, PASOK got 43 % in the poorest, Pella (4.3% for KKE, 2.5% for Syriza), 49 % in Etolo-Acarmania (6.2% and 2.8%), 53% in Rodope (2.5% and 4.2%). The vote for PASOK has therefore a class character. and the popular sectors have used it to throw out the right.

We are then some distance from the crisis PASOK went through after 2004, which had led the party to the edge of a split. Giorgos Papandreou, the much less charismatic son of his father Andreas (the founder of PASOK), president of the Socialist International and a believer in "participatory democracy", was able to impose a "modernist" left line referring to Obama. Of course, the programme of PASOK only superficially involves a break with rightist policies. Its electoral programme is a catalogue of very general principles, for equality between women and men, for effective income support for farmers, strengthening of workers' rights to information and negotiation, reducing deregulation of the labour market, the same generalities put forward for the European elections in June and on which most people agree! But apart from the talk of transparency of the State apparatus, there is an emphasis on a more Keynesian crisis management, with support for wage demands and productive mobilization of liquidity previously available to the banks, while the right's program was the destruction and the rapid recomposition of capital in favour of the productive sectors. It should be noted that this is the reason for which PASOK got real support from some sectors of the bourgeoisie, threatened in the short-term by the crisis. But the contradictions of this policy may explode in the very short term as a result of the violence of the crisis and the European neoliberal framework: it will be necessary to very quickly decide between two roads that involve opposed class choices.

This is where the right and the parties to the left of PASOK have tried to criticise Papandreou's electoral campaign, demanding he set out concretely and costs his measures! But in fact, the principle that will guide the policy of PASOK has just been enunciated by the spokesperson of the new government, Giorgos Petalotis, concerning the status of the commercial port of Piraeus, assigned by the right to a Chinese company: "we want to ensure, with public interest criteria, healthy competition." We know better than ever, one year after the outbreak of the crisis and the so-called reforms of capitalism, what the public interest is when it comes to preserving the criteria of the capitalist economy!

A right in crisis, a far right to watch

The defeat is conclusive: 10.5% behind PASOK (in 2007, it was 3.7% ahead), 8% and close to 800,000 votes down in 2 years. The demagoguery on a so-called social right collapsed: in two years, the right has confirmed its involvement in financial scandals, its inability to guarantee essential functions (lack of government to deal with the catastrophic fires of the summers of 2007 and 2009), but especially its alignment with the policies of the European right in the social field. Result: catastrophic unemployment figures. Thus, there were 50,000 more unemployed in July (+ 129,000 in one year) an official figure around 10 %, but in truth around 15 % according to the GSEE trade union confederation, with categories (those aged under 24: 24 %) and regions (Macedonia, Epirus) facing near disaster. In contradiction with the official discourse of Karamanlis on measures to reduce state debt, 53 billion Euros have also been quietly borrowed over the last 3 years, while at the same time purchasing power has shrunk, although never by enough in the eyes of the Greek employers!

All this, added to the choice of indiscriminate repression against workers and the young people, to that of increasing military spending to the detriment of funds for fire fighting, has discredited conclusively the right of Kostas Karamanlis, nephew of the former leader of the right, Konstantinos. Faced with the urgent need to defend big capital, he tried to campaign on the theme of the need for tough anti-crisis measures (a public deficit probably around 12% of GDP this year, enormous debt at 108 %, trade deficit at 12 %). His defeat is therefore that of a policy desired by the big employers and this must be recalled tirelessly when PASOK tries to impose the same measures (pensions, social security and so on).

In the meantime, the magnitude of the defeat caused a major crisis in the right: on the evening of the elections, Karamanlis announced that he was resigning as president of the party, and at least 4 candidates have emerged to take his place. Since then, war has raged, strengthening the crisis situation without offering a credible alternative and thus presaging a very tough period for the Greek right. Indeed, at least 2 of the candidates are "heirs": Dora Bakoyannis, daughter of the former prime minister Kostas Mitsotakis and herself a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Antonis Samaras, scion of a great family of the Greek bourgeoisie and regarded as a traitor to the party by many for having founded in the 1990s the nationalist groupuscule "Political Spring". The third is the former Mayor of Athens, Dimitri Avramopoulos, an intriguing character who tried to play a few years ago on an "apolitical" profile to launch a "new centre" which quickly ran into the sand. As for the fourth, Panayotis Psomiadis, prefect of the region of Thessaloniki, he is an extremely dangerous populist characterised by nationalism and links with the far right. Regardless of who its new President is. New Democracy will take time to find a semblance of unity.

In such a situation, the immediate danger to workers could come from the extreme right: in this country where the memory of the fascist military junta of 1967-74 is still alive, fascists, even if they have been protected by the state apparatus, were until now a fringe phenomenon. For a few years

now, with the pauperisation of the popular sectors and the massive arrival of impoverished refugees at this eastern frontier of Europe, the far right has raised its head around a caudillo, Giorgos Karatzaferis who wants to copy the success of the Front National in France: populism, racist campaigns against immigrants, attempts to gain respectability. Its success in the European parliamentary elections in June (366,600 votes, 7.15%, compared with 4.12% in 2004) showed its influence and resulted in an immediate alignment of the Government on its positions.

Throughout the summer, the police mounted spectacular and shameful raid operations in neighbourhoods inhabited by immigrants, often on the basis of local hate campaigns conducted by the extreme right. In general, although Karamanlis always excluded specific alliances with the far right, an extremist hardening has taken place on the ground, facilitated by the presence of an extreme right in the kernel of New Democracy (illustrated by Psomiadis, but it is far from being isolated). What is most obvious is the tolerance of the Government towards a neo-Nazi groupuscule, Chryssi Avgi ("Golden Dawn"), which is not only protected by the police, but openly work with them at demonstrations! The new PASOK minister of public order has also just said he is shocked by such complicity which he has witnessed in the recent past and one wonders what the consequences will be.

The big question in this period is whether Karatzaferis's party "LAOS" (the people), will be able to take advantage of the crisis on the right. Answer: no doubt, but to a more limited extent than one might fear. Indeed, a vacuum has appeared on the right, as we said, well before the elections, and in addition, as history always shows, anti-immigrant measures strengthen the extreme right vote. We might therefore have feared the worst, with many polls showing LAOS between 6 and 7 % before even the full election campaign, at which the party had 2 strengths: lots of money, and a leader capable of developing on TV the theme of "the true right", playing also on the weaknesses of the left. However, even if its score increased compared to the parliamentary elections of 2007 (it then obtained 271,000 votes, 3.8 per cent and 10 members), and even though it became the 4th biggest party ahead of Syriza, its success was still contained, and the disappointment was visible among the supporters of LAOS. That said, the political and social field remains full of potential for this group ranging from the disappointed of the right to recycled neo-Nazis and anti-racist and anti-fascist vigilance is a permanent task for workers' organizations, especially if we take into account the fact that the neo-Nazi groupuscule Chryssi Avgi obtained an impressive score, given its discourse and practices, 19,600 votes and 0.29 %.

A setback for the KKE

For several years, the KKE leadership has embarked on a radical policy in its discourse and sometimes in practice, but marked in fact by a sectarianism which would be unimaginable for many European countries (including Portugal) and support for the bourgeois order if it is threatened by a mobilization it doesn't control. The KKE adopts a radical discourse which would not be foreign to the French NPA or comrades of the Fourth International (a break with capitalism, dynamic mobilizations in support of struggles) so that this party, who had lost all its youth in the early 1990s, has recruited many young people. At the same time, this apparent radicalism is accompanied by sectarian acts not serving the interests of workers. Thus, while with the GSEE Confederation, workers have a single federation (in addition, this union discusses permanently on the basis of contradictory lines, even if instead of union tendencies, it is a matter of strict political factions ranging from the far left to the right), the KKE has created a current, PAME, which in fact plays the role of a 2nd union and whose only action is to call mobilizations separately from GSEE. Lately, this "radicalism" has stressed the benefits of Stalin, up to the point of denying his crimes, attributed to fear of the bourgeoisie! In the same way the newspaper "Rizospastis" also published a few months ago a long article on the NPA in

France, to demonstrate that this party was at the service of the bourgeoisie (without providing support to the PCF: the KKE has links with the remaining ultra-Stalinist sectors of the PCF or those which have left it)! PASOK is the great Devil and Syriza, whose historical leaders had founded Synaspismos with the KKE at the beginning of the 1990s to form a Government with the right, is a true enemy!

During the youth mobilizations of December 2008, while participating in the mobilizations with separate demonstrations, the KKE adopted the same discourse as Karamanlis against Syriza who supposedly had encouraged “looters” (!), and this when the urgent task for the left was precisely to give political expressions (self-organization, extension to the labour movement) avoided by the violent movement of the first days after the killing of Alexis Grigoriadis killing by a police officer. There are many more examples of situations where the KKE, instead of strengthening youth and worker mobilisations, has actually rendered service to the right by its sectarianism.

Indeed, while the KKE has for several elections reinforced its electoral weight, the European elections were a signal. Even taking account of the increase in abstentions, it got 428,000 votes (8.35%) against 580,000 (9.48%) in 2004. At the parliamentary elections, even if it remains the 3rd party, it lost 70,000 votes and went from 8.15% to 7.53% of the vote with a noted decline in working class neighbourhoods that even its General Secretary, Aleka Papariga, deemed worrying. After initial explanations of a purely Stalinist kind (it was the fault of the media, PASOK and so on – all in the framework of a offensive programmed by the bourgeoisie against THE workers’ party) the leadership has promised to investigate the results. Let us be sure: there is nothing to expect on this front!

However, it would seem that a challenge to the line is beginning to appear. According to the press, the leadership received a text signed by “cadres and members of important sectors of the KKE”, which says: “it is not possible that it is always the fault of others. Let us stop insisting on the forward march of the working-class, while we have not succeeded in greatly distinguishing what are in fact today the characteristics or changes that have occurred in it! (...) Why exclude working with other forces, for the sake of ideological purity? Why continue the theoretical analyses questioning any challenge to Stalin? Why are we unable to see that Greek society is moving in completely different directions? Our result does not correspond to expectations, perhaps because we ourselves are not in correspondence with society?” A few months after a Congress cut off from the everyday reality of workers and youth, and despite the non-election to the CC of 2 or 3 dinosaurs, does this text presage, on the basis of the worrying results, the beginning of a critical discussion and profound developments? For the time being, the leadership of the KKE vehemently denies the existence of this text and cries provocation! To be continued...

SYRIZA: little more than the objective of survival

For Syriza, the outcome of the European elections was a real trauma and the opportunity for a return to prosaic realities. Although the leadership of this grouping of Synaspismos with small groups of the radical and revolutionary left knew that it was now far from the poll ratings of 18% in Spring 2008, the objectives were announced as sure: more than 10% of the vote and 3 MEPs. Result: 240,900 votes (250,400 in 2004), 4.7% (against 4.1) and 1MEP, as in 2004. Immediately, a violent crisis broke in this grouping. Firstly, the left in Syriza said that it was the fault the renovator current of Syn, then the criticism extended to the whole of Syn, and by the end of August, we saw most of these groups take a position between the two Syn leaders belonging to the same majority current: Alekos Alavanos and Alexis Tsipras. In these internal debates the group Kokkino, sympathetic to the Fourth International, split around the debate inside Syriza. The reaction of Syn as ultra dominant

party in the grouping was to impose its solution to rescue a situation where the polls showed the risk of Syriza falling below the 3% threshold necessary to enter Parliament. Following a series of meetings of the leadership and the currents of Syn the candidacy of Tsipras, the young leader of Syn, was "proposed". And it is to the latter's credit that he succeeded in recent weeks in giving Syriza a semblance of unity with a campaign that succeeded in remobilising supporters and voters. Result: much better than 3%, Syriza got 315,000 votes (against 361,000 in 2007) and 4.6% (against 5.04%). It thus elected 13 deputies (14 in 2007) but became the 5th party behind LAOS. That said, Tsipras and a few cadres around Synaspismos have managed to save the parliamentary existence of Syriza, and it is good that the radical left can be heard. Its disappearance would also no doubt lead both to the end of the Syriza group and the breakup of Synaspismos. But beyond numbers and Tsipras's merit, this election result is almost exclusively attributable to Synaspismos, both in terms of the campaign and in the results.

Indeed, the objective of the campaign was clearly determined by Tsipras: "our objective is to win in relation to the entry threshold for Parliament" ("Eleftherotypia", September 29, 2009). Thus emergency measures to make the bosses pay, unitary mobilizations, the prospects for a necessary break with the capitalist system have taken second place to the objective priority, an input into Parliament and the institutional existence of Syriza. The vote won remains higher than that obtained by Synaspismos alone at the parliamentary elections of 2004 (241,500 votes, 7.2 %) and 2000 (219,900 votes, 3.2%) but lower than in 1996 (347,000,) 5.12%). Of the 13 deputies, 10 are members of Syn (including at least 4 from its renovator current), and the other 3 are not members of radical or revolutionary left groups, but independent activists related to Syn. Hence, while it is necessary to discuss on the ground with Syn, to campaign together whenever possible, the urgent thing is not to help it maintain itself in the name of a left language which remains very relative, but to build an independent anti-capitalist left.

However, this is not necessarily the turn which the discussions in the left of Syriza will take: at a meeting of various components on the left of Synaspismos, questions focused primarily on the organizational future of Syriza... and on the distribution of the money paid to Syriza's deputies! It will also be very interesting to see what will emerge from the preparatory discussion at the national Syriza meeting planned for November to decide on its future organizational form. In this new phase, we can see that it is important to discuss with the left components the increased opportunities to build an anti-capitalist left.

The Anti-Capitalist Left, too slowly, but surely

We know that the tradition of dispersal of the revolutionary forces in Greece has something incomprehensible about it, and there is much delay in relation to other countries with strong social mobilizations in the project of build a unifying instrument of anti-capitalist forces. Although the scores remain very limited, elements in the results of the ANTARSYA grouping allow us to assert that the "left landscape" is being clarified in the right direction.

Two years ago a first step had occurred with the presentation of two "fronts" each grouping the two biggest organizations of the Greek far left, the NAR (a group born after initially on the left of the KKE involving most of its youth) and the SEK (sister organisation of the British SWP). One, MERA (around NAR), got 11,800 votes (0.17%), and the other, ENANTIA (SEK and other organizations, including OKDE-SPARTAKOS, Greek section of the Fourth International), 10,600 votes and 0.15%. At the same time, two Maoist organizations (KKE - ML and ML - KKE!) secured 0.25 and 0.11 % of the votes.

Two years later, the two groupings have joined forces, on the basis of joint mobilizations (December 2008) and the anti-capitalist regroupments underway in Europe. In the June 2009 European elections the grouping ANTARSYA obtained 22,000 voice and 0.43%, arriving in 13th place, with the Maoists getting 0.26% of the votes. For these parliamentary elections, ANTARSYA waged a good campaign in accordance with its activist implantation, while the situation was unfavourable in electoral terms: a strong polarization to get rid of the right (and for the survival of Syriza), and no access to the media, unlike the institutional parties who virtually camped in the TV studios! However, ANTARSYA got 24,700 votes and 0.36%, coming 8th just after the Greens and the group of a former PASOK minister of nationalist obsessions with a high media profile. And most importantly, the two Maoist groups went down to 0.16% and 0.08%: the left landscape has therefore been clarified and we can be sure that if the stakes for Syriza had not been so dramatic, voters would have been attracted by the anti-capitalist left list. In any case, this result strengthens the common will to continue in the construction of such a left, and the key issue in the period will of course be to make progress in areas such as the establishment of united front frameworks, the discussion with the sectors of Syriza which will pose the question of independence in relation to that organisation, and so on. The upcoming mobilizations will of course be the best framework for working together.

First mobilisations

PASOK's initial measures do not break with the policies of Karamanlis: the minister for "protection of the citizen" Chryssochoïdis, has sent a veritable army of police to occupy the protest district of Exarchia (in central Athens). The goal: to show that with PASOK, republican order will reign everywhere. Already, protest mobilizations have taken place in this neighbourhood, where young Alexis was killed last year. Papandreou has made an alarmist speech on the state of the economy: there is therefore no doubt on the continuation of the policy favourable to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The workers for their part will not grant this Government the luxury of a period of "state of grace".

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] In 2007, there was no ANTARSYA list, but two lists of coalitions which then formed this unitary grouping.