

The Greek test of strength and the urgency of a strategic debate on the left

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The temporary “solution” of the Greek crisis (in reality, a crisis of the European Union) by an attack of an amazing ferocity against the workers, the plundering of their country and the putting under supervision of their institutions constitutes a major event. The fact that this “solution” was accepted by the executive team of Syriza around Alexis Tsipras, in spite of the massive vote against the austerity that occurred one week earlier at the time of the referendum decided by this same government, brutally challenges all the left forces fighting for an alternative to neo-liberal austerity. By an impressive speeding up of the history, all this left - including in Greece: the left of Syriza is not giving up - is suddenly confronted with a strategic debate of the greatest importance: how to articulate social struggle and policy at the national and European level; what attitude to take to the Euro and the European Union; what political/institutional perspective to adopt? In this vital debate for the survival of the left, the LCR Belgium puts the theses below forward for discussion.

1. The Greek experiment - the victory of an anti-austerity party as an alternative to social democracy which has led six months later to a new and even harsher austerity cure - obliges all the left forces and the labour movement to realise the enormous obstacle that not only the euro but also the European Union constitutes. The EU is not a force for peace, progress and democracy: it is a despotic set of institutions and rules entirely in the service of the capitalist project of the major industrial and financial groups. These want to make clean slate of the social and democratic conquests to face inter-capitalist competition in the world arena.

2. If this third memorandum passes, the defeat suffered by the exploited and oppressed of Greece will be initially the result of the cowardice of the traditional leaderships of the labour movement and the left (both political and trade-union) in the rest of Europe their inaction and even shameful complicity with the troika. This is the fruit of decades of collaboration with the “European project” on the part of social democracy, the Christian Democrats and the European Trade Union Confederation. But this defeat would be also the product of the governmental strategy of Syriza’s leadership, based on the fatal illusion of a possible compromise within the framework of the European Union and the Euro. Indeed, it is this illusion that has led Tsipras to sacrifice the will of the Greek people, expressed clearly in the referendum (that Tsipras had called himself!), on altar of “respect” for these institutions and the “sense of responsibility” concerning their “stability”.

3. The cruelty of the austerity once again imposed on the Greek people is a measure of the fear of the European ruling classes: fear of the victory of Syriza and the decomposition of Greek social democracy, and consequently the absence of a political solution of replacement for the middle-class; fear of the risk of contagion in Europe, initially in Spain with Podemos; fear, especially, of the

fantastic popular mobilization which led to the victory of “Not” with the referendum, and which was likely to give to this contagion an uncontrollable dynamic.

4. The proof has been given that a social, democratic and ecological policy is not realizable without overturning the EU. The alternative is not a retreat to nation states – a path that could have no other result a return to war between European powers – but a long-term combat aiming at paralysing then to break the EU in order to make possible the creation by the people of a completely different structure: the socialist United States of Europe.

5. To move forward in the direction of another Europe (thus of a constituent assembly of the European peoples) implies immediately coordinating the fights against austerity. This coordination confronts the difficulty not only of the policy of the traditional organizations, but also the great differences of rhythms and situations between the countries and the division between countries – that the European Union sharpens and that the single currency deepens by stimulating the international division of labour and the unequal development within Europe itself. The action of a left government in a country must thus seek to support internationalist solidarity and the popular mobilizations on the basis of rejection of austerity and despotism, and thus aim at creating the conditions of struggles which extend a greater number of countries, which converge, coordinate and make the EU and the euro increasingly ungovernable.

6. Leaving the Euro is not a sufficient condition to break with austerity (as the case of Britain proves) but, in the Greek case, for the countries of the periphery and those which are not in the heart of the euro zone, it is clearly a requirement.

7. The need to break with the euro does not imply making leaving the euro the central axis of an alternative programme. Even in Greece, where the question arises in a burning and immediate way, the axis of the alternative programme must be the rejection of any austerity and the implementation of social, ecological, anticapitalist and democratic policies, which directly improve the fate of workers, young people, women, the victims of racism, and the peasants.

8. To make leaving the euro the axis of the alternative would be to run up unnecessarily against the very generally-held idea that the currency is only “neutral” technical means of allowing trade, whereas it is in fact also the crystallization of a social relationship. To make leaving the euro (or the EU) the axis of the battle would be also to play the game of the hard-line and far right, by spreading the illusion that a harmonious socio-economic-ecological development would be possible within the national framework. This illusion harms internationalist solidarity. However, this is crucial not only for the fight in Greece, but also because the integration of the economies on the continent requires a European anticapitalist perspective to satisfy social needs and to answer the urgent ecological needs.

9. In the current conjuncture, outside a (pre) revolutionary period, the completely intransigent rejection of austerity, the intransigent requirement of democratic policies and respect for popular sovereignty, concrete measures of self-defence against internal and external capitalist sabotage – such as the socialization of the banks, capital controls, a land register and inheritance taxes, suspending the payment of the debt and its cancellation, workers’ control in the companies – are an indispensable condition for achieving this goal.

10. The key of the situation does not lie in the development of a “plan B”, a catalogue of more or less technical measurements – which implies by definition a “plan A” of staying in the Euro. It resides in a social strategy centred on the winning of ideological hegemony by a block bringing together the exploited and oppressed (workers, including notably women, youth, small farmers, illegal immigrants and the racialized) in the perspective of mass confrontation with capitalist logic and the

European institutions which incarnate it.

11. A strategy which states clearly and without flinching that it will go forward until the moment of rupture, without worrying about the institutional crisis it will provoke in the EU, without worrying about the loss of credibility which results for the alleged “the European project” or “the stability of the euro”, makes it possible to move from the defensive to the offensive because it encourages the mass mobilization of the exploited and oppressed. The week of mobilization for NO in the referendum, in Greece, showed the enormous social energy that can be released in this way, and how it can attract women, youth and workers in Europe and in the world.

12. The enemy is not “Germany” but capitalism and its institutions, the first of which is the European Union. The euro is not the currency that Germany imposes on Europe but the currency that European capital needs to reduce its transaction expenses, to strengthen finance and to have a broad market for its multinationals. Neo-liberalism is not a German dogma produced by the Lutheran ideology or the Nazi past of Germany but the only really existing form of international capitalism battling against its double social and ecological dead end. German domination of the European Union is not a national domination but a domination of capital, of which German workers are also victims. Leave aside demagogic remarks which divert our attention from our real adversary. The alternative is not a “democrats front” against Germany, it is a front of the exploited and oppressed against capital and its institutions. Belgian employers, Belgian banks and the Belgian government, like its predecessors with “socialist” participation, actively supported the social war against the Greek popular classes which profited them.

13. The strategy that we propose requires a recomposition of the labour movement and the left, on both the political and the trade-union level. The two dimensions are inseparable. On the one hand, given mass unemployment, the European institutional obstacle and the total and irreversible transformation of social democracy into social-liberalism, the building of new parties on the left of social democracy and the Greens is more than ever essential. In addition, the increased sharpness of the fight to be carried out requires an in-depth social mobilization, therefore the construction of democratically organized social movements, with active implication of working people and youth in the workplaces and in the local areas. Within this framework, winning back the trade unions by their members occupies a strategic place, as does the fight against the false ideas that confuse “trade-union independence” and “apolitical attitude”.

14. The fight continues, in a partly new context. At the time of writing, the result is uncertain. If the troika gains this battle, it will be at the cost of a major discredit of the EU in general and its German motor in particular, without solving the Greek crisis in the medium and long term, in particular the debt crisis, and by weakening the euro. In Greece, a new political recomposition of the left of the left is on the agenda to offer an alternative to the attempt at “national unity” in Parliament around “yes” to the diktat. More than ever, it is a question of developing solidarity acting alongside the workers and the youth of Greece. Everywhere, it is a question of renewing radicalizing the fight against austerity and for a political expression of this combat, learning the lessons from Greece.

15. Let us draw them in particular in Belgium, because the parallel is obvious between the strategy of Tsipras (“a referendum to better negotiate”) and that of the trade-union leaderships at home (“an action plan to open a dialogue”). The Greek defeat should show us where this “responsible” strategy will lead us if we do not force our organizations to change course.

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