

# Greece: the Revolution and its prospects

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Greece is in a crisis so deep that the entire future of the country is called into question with the government split and the Greek people threatening more strikes and protests against austerity, writes Martin Suchanek

The 19th and 20th of October marked a new high point in the mass mobilisations in Greece, creating the political high point of a pre-revolutionary situation. The 48-hour general strike was the biggest one since Greece's economy was placed under the supervision of the troika of the EU authorities, the European Central bank and the IMF.

Papandreou's desperate move to announce a referendum on the latest cuts package panicked other EU leaders and he was forced to withdraw it under the pressure from Sarkozy and Merkel. This crisis shows the impasse that the Greek government has entered. It is aware that the ruling PASOK majority lacks not only legitimacy, but also the means to push through all the acts. What the botched referendum move shows is that Papandreou is desperately trying to maneuver the opposition into a broader coalition, backing an emergency government (perhaps made up of "independent" experts) This would be a government even more remote from the pressure of the people.

And the whole last days not only showed the deceit of the parliamentary parties and the parliamentary system - it also demonstrated that the imperialist "democrats" in Berlin, Paris and Brussels shows only contempt for any democratic saying of the population. A referendum on the cuts - which would at least allow the democratic participation of the Greek people in the future of their country - was denounced as "irresponsible" by the European political elites.

## **The government in the service of imperialism and finance capital**

Greece is, in many respects, in the centre of the political development of Europe. On the one hand, the "rescue package" of the EU is being implemented there as a kind of experiment in the form of an historically unprecedented savings and cuts programme. De facto, this is under the political supervision and control of the troika. The government has to go begging for every single tranche of billions of euros and has to say that all the measures so far taken were too little, that the population must be further bled, that a new savings programme must be introduced.

The Greek parliament or, more accurately, the governing PASOK party obeys the wishes of its masters. On 20 October it agreed a further austerity programme that, among other things, introduces further cuts in the salaries in the public sector of up to 50% and in effect the repeal of all wage contracts in the private sector which will probably lead to cuts in wages of some 20%.

The dictates of the troika are in fact sharpening the crisis. That is understood and accepted because the EU and above all the leading powers Germany and France, are not primarily concerned with the "rescue" of Greece but with the aspirations of European and international finance capital, the banks and institutional

bondholders.

The problem, however, is that the Greek state could collapse under the burden of debt and this would result in unforeseeable consequences across the whole Eurozone and the world economy, resulting in Spain and Italy also facing state bankruptcy. That is why writing off half the debts of the country was unavoidable, in order to secure its ability to continue paying and servicing the remaining debts.

The European Central bank and IMF will not hand over more aid and credit before they see "deeds" in this case the implementation of the cuts package. The banks will suspend their agreement on the Greek state debt reduction, if the Greece state does not follow their imperialist masters with determination.

This "hard course" against Greece is intended as a lesson to other governments. Portugal, Spain and Italy are to draw the conclusion that the present Euro crisis and the political crisis in the EU will be used to develop the EU into a politically more united bloc.

The harshness of the "rescue" is not only the means by which will Greece be forced into much greater, almost colonial, dependence - it will also serve to push forward a stronger centralisation of finance policy within the EU under German-French control which will turn the EU from an alliance of states into an imperialist federal-state under German hegemony with a French "partner"

### **Rising class struggles**

However, Greece is also in the focus of political development for another reason. The programme of the EU and the PASOK government could be shattered not only by the internal contradictions of the European states but also by mass resistance; on this front, the struggle has led to the development of an already long drawn out pre-revolutionary crisis. Since 2006/7, the country has experienced a wave of rising class struggles unprecedented in Europe: the student movement of 2006/7 with its occupations and riots even before the world economic crisis; a mass uprising of the youth in December 2008 after the murder of a 15-year-old school student Alexis Grigoropoulos by the police, mass solidarity actions and the eruption of a pre-revolutionary situation which led to the collapse of the Conservative government: new elections and the electoral victory of the now governing National-populist PASOK was the result.

Since 2009, there have been 13 general strikes and many longer strikes. At the beginning of 2011, despite repeated mass mobilisations, the movement did appear to be losing momentum. However, inspired by the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia and the occupation of public squares in Spain, a "movement of the indignant" also developed in Athens and other Greek cities. At the beginning, this movement was also characterised by a rejection of all political parties and a libertarian, anti-organisation tendency. That, however, changed more quickly than elsewhere because the attacks by the police on demonstrators and occupiers led many to see that organisation is necessary and that political and trade union organisations are unavoidable partners.

Finally, in recent months, undoubtedly as a result of the establishment of the "Indignants" here has been the spread of the occupation of squares but also to longer strikes in important sectors especially in transport and in the public sector. Time and again, ministries and officers were occupied. In many districts, public sector workers have begun to stop carrying out particular state functions for example the sale of tickets on public transport as a protest against the government.

In brief, we are not only dealing with an increased mobilisation of the working class and of the youth as well as a greater part of the middle layers but also with a deepening of the whole movement. Alongside the occupation of the squares this has also favoured the establishment of new mobilising structures on a local

or workplace-base, and the action committees which draw in more and new activists and strengthen the mobilisations for the demonstrations.

In addition, the confrontation between PASOK and the trade unions has increased. The governing party has suffered a massive loss of members and a devastating loss of support in opinion polls, down now to about 15% support. Even though the 2 biggest trade union confederations still stand close to PASOK, several of their sectional trade unions have given notice of the withdrawal of their formal support. This mobilisation and polarisation has put wind in the sails of the left parties. Together, the Stalinist KKE, SYRIZA and Antarsya are receiving about 25% support in opinion polls. It also says a great deal about the situation that 50% say they are undecided. Opinion polls are of course only indicators of opinions and developing political tendencies among the masses. All the same they reveal an important aspect of the overall political situation: social polarisation. At the moment, this is favouring the left in whom the population, in particular its more active sections, is placing its hope.

The political centre, PASOK, is now in free fall and its decline will continue in the face of the current attacks. What is holding it together at all are 2 factors: on the one side the support of the troika which cannot see any effective alternative to PASOK government in order to ensure the implementation of its Dictates; and on the other that all the other bourgeois parties are fearful of having to take over the responsibility of government. The Right still has no immediate effective and viable alternative programme. Basically, the NEA also knows that the Greek bourgeoisie must undertake a general attack on the entire population but, above all, on the working class.

The current political polarisation cannot last forever or always favour the left; the impetus of the mass movement can only last for a limited time. Either it will be successful in resolving the crisis by revolutionary means, or a continual impoverishment of the masses and implementation of the cuts programmes will lead to the demoralisation of the population, confusion among the masses on the one side and as a result of increasing hopelessness to radicalisation and advance of the counterrevolution. This could take several forms: an authoritarian solution, the banning of strikes, a declaration of a state of emergency, a "government of national unity" or a "government of experts" or even the growth of the fascists.

Briefly, for Greece, now there is only the alternative between revolution and counterrevolution.

It is undoubtedly true at the moment that the government camp and the ruling class in Greece is on the political defensive. Nonetheless, there are massive obstacles in the way of a revolutionary solution. The greatest of these is the crisis of political leadership of the mass movement. It is scarcely possible to mobilise more people than have already been mobilised. Further, limited, general strikes will not change anything fundamentally. The government knows that, as do many demonstrators. As a result, practically the whole movement, practically all parties and currents of the left opposition, from anarchists to reformists in KKE and the majority of SYRIZA through to the leftist forces in the centrist organisations on the left wing of SYRIZA and above all Antarsya openly speak of the need to overthrow the government. More radical forces argue that an uprising must be undertaken. All this shows that everything is pointing towards a decisive test, the struggle for state power or the pre-revolutionary situation will become "over-ripe" and begin to rot, like a fruit that is not harvested.

### **For the generalisation and centralisation of the councils**

The district committees and the action committees in the factories that have been created in recent months must be generalised and built into workers' council structures as an alternative power to the state apparatus. It is not enough only to build more and more of these at the local level; it is absolutely necessary that they also be built on a countrywide level on the basis of direct democratic methods to

election and permanent recallability, it is a matter of creating a countrywide counter power.

For that, the demand for a countrywide Congress of delegates from the councils, the district and factory committees, from the schools and universities must be raised. Such a Congress must be convened as quickly as possible.

It must not only discuss and decide upon a programme for the overthrow of the government but also decide on what is to replace it. It is precisely here that the fundamental weaknesses of the Greek revolution in its present stage can be seen. The overthrow of the government, even the need for an uprising (even if no more precise than that) is on everyone's lips. What is missing is a clear perspective not only of how this government is to be overthrown but, above all, over what is to replace it.

### **Unlimited general strike!**

In our opinion, an unlimited general strike controlled and led by the action committees and strike committees and the embryonic councils must be pushed forward actively. This demand must not only be placed on the newly created committees but on all workers' organisations, the big trade unions ADADY and GSEE BC and ABC and the PAME which is close to the KKE and on the various parties which have their roots in the working class movement such as KKE, SYRIZA and Antarsya.

Another, immediately important issue, essential for survival, is the building of self defence organisations for the movement, to defend strikes, demonstrations and occupations under their democratic control and able to coordinate the already existing stewards' organisations of the various left groups. As 20 October showed, without this there is always the threat that the activities of provocateurs or adventurers (such as sections of the anarchists) or even understandable but politically counter-productive individual actions, will disorganise the whole movement.

An unlimited general strike would, without doubt, post the question of power. It must, therefore, go alongside the building of defence organisations as the first seeds of a workers' militia and also with agitation in the Army and towards the forces of repression to not allow themselves to be used any more against the population, to refuse to carry out orders to attack strikers and demonstrators and to form soldiers' councils which stand on the side of the masses. A revolutionary rising, the struggle for power, must base itself on the support and political maturity of proletarian and semi-proletarian masses who understand the necessity of such a step and are therefore also prepared to defend it. It must also base itself on political agitation and clear political objectives.

### **For a workers' government based on councils of resistance**

The General strike requires clear political objectives, a programme that will ensure that the cost of the crisis is no longer borne by the workers and peasants, the young and the old. It needs a programme that concentrates on the following points:

Cancellation of debts, stop the IMF EU dictates! Cancel the debts of the local governments!

Open books of all companies, all contracts and transactions of the bank and the state, progressive taxation of the rich and wealthy, an end to taxation of the masses!

Price control committees for food, housing et cetera in order to counter price rises and the introduction of a sliding scale of wages and welfare benefits!

For a minimum wage, minimum pension, free access to education, school, universities and health services!

Measures to defend the petty bourgeois farmers and fishermen from ruin, including cheap credit at the same time as securing the rights of workers in all firms which employ wage labour!

Expropriation of the banks without compensation and of the imperialist investors, big industry and the big landlords.

For a central bank under workers' control! For democratic planning of large-scale industry and a programme of public works under workers' control in order to get the economy back on its feet as well as distribution of work amongst all available workers in order to rid the world of the scourge of unemployment.

These measures, all of which point in the direction of a transition to a democratically planned economy, could only be implemented by a workers' government which is based on the organs of dual power which will break up the bourgeois state apparatus with its bureaucratic police and military repressive apparatus and replace it with council democracy and the workers' militia. The demand, to take the course of such an anti-capitalist workers' government must today be placed on all those left parties KKE, SYRIZA, Antarsya and the trade unions. The target of the revolution is to remove the power of the capitalist class and create a new social order in the interest of the great majority, those dependent on wages. It is also important to win the petty bourgeoisie who are threatened with destruction and to make it clear to them that only the working class can introduce a social order that can save them from ruin. Above all, however, it is necessary to bring together the working class as a whole behind such a program. Today, it is above all reformist and bureaucratic forces that exercise the most influence in the Greek workers' movement. Alongside the trade union bureaucracy, whose leaders even now are still hanging onto the governing party PASOK, this means above all the KKE and the SYRIZA.

The KKE is a Stalinist, reformist party which is taking an opportunist nationalist course and wants to know nothing about the immediate need for socialist revolution the destruction of the bourgeois state and the establishment of council rule. With regard to other forces in the movement it behaves in an extremely sectarian way and frequently rejects any joint activity, even if in recent weeks the pressure from its own membership in favour of common actions has grown greater.

SYRIZA or, more accurately, the main wing of Synaspismos (a social democratic party represented in the European left party and corresponding to the LINKE in Germany) certainly conducts itself in a less sectarian manner towards the forces in the mass movement but is also reformist. Like the KKE it ultimately expects to see a change by parliamentary methods. KKE and SYRIZA are, however, mass parties which organise the main sections of the working class and whose influence is growing at the moment. The trade union PAME, for example, which is close to the KKE, is very strong amongst the workers in the transport sector, especially in the harbours. It is therefore absolutely necessary with regard to these mass parties, and also the trade unions, not only to criticise and to make clear their reformist mistakes but also to draw their mass bases into common struggle and thus convince them of the need for Revolutionary leadership. That means that, with regard to these organisations, the policy of the workers' united front must be systematically applied.

That is however one reason why the "tactics" of sections of the Greek anarchists who have gone as far as to make violent attacks on contingents of the PAME and KKE are counter-productive and objectively play into the hands of the counter revolution and the state.

In reality, the anarchists, as in every revolutionary crisis, are a force which has no real alternative, which has no programme for the seizure of power, no programme for an alternative social order and which "at best" expresses the confusion and indignation of sections of the oppressed but ultimately leads these into a dead end.

## Revolutionary party

The creation of a conscious revolutionary leadership, a new revolutionary party, is therefore the key question in the Greek Revolution. Alongside the reformist parties and the anarchists there are in the Greek movement several centrist groups and parties and alliances which waver between reformism and revolutionary Marxism. Unlike the reformists, these groups more or less openly pose the need for a revolutionary change. Most of them recognise, at least in words, and unlike the reformists and anarchists, that a policy of the united front is necessary and that the question of power must be resolved.

On their own, they are stuck at halfway. What is lacking is a clear course towards the unlimited general strike and the creation of councils and towards a workers' government and its programme.

Therefore, there is an enormous responsibility on these forces, on Antarsya and the left forces in SYRIZA, and organisations whose origins are in Trotskyism or Maoism or who originate in the KKE. They organise thousands and have probably tens of thousands of supporters. Even if Antarsya is at present an alliance of 10 organisations of the "radical" left it is nonetheless more of a network than a party.

That may well make it easier to "overcome" internal contradictions, but it is an enormous disadvantage in the face of the current tasks of these groups. This is nothing more nor less than the creation of a revolutionary combat party which can lead the Greek working-class, the Greek revolution, to victory

It is precisely this objective that Antarsya and the left in SYRIZA must set themselves. For this they can and must win thousands of revolutionary workers and youth to the creation of a new party on the basis of a revolutionary action programme.

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