

Greece, Syriza, the Euro... and what about us?

A contribution by Anarkismo - the international network of libertarian communist organisations

For years now, the Greek people have been confronted with the Troika's diktats. The latter, made up of the International Monetary Fund, the Central European Bank and the European Union, is a tool in the hands of capitalism and those that serve it, first and foremost, our States' governments.

It is no more than the European extension of what other capitalist institutions have been imposing on other peoples, on other continents.

The situation in Greece is still at the heart of public debate in all our countries; it is food for thought in political, union and associative organisations in a global manner. And because it presents a highly symbolic dimension, yet grounded in reality, it calls for all our attention and internationalist solidarity. This is the scope of this contribution, common to different countries' libertarian communist organisations, members of the anarkismo network¹.

Syriza, a politically reformist coalition

Large parts of the Greek population have been leading momentous struggles to resist the steamroller of misery, inequalities, and exclusions: demonstrations, strikes, self-organisation have led to factory take-overs, creation of self-managed locations, etc. This type of actions has demonstrated the social movement's capacity to organise resistance and open paths towards new solutions, disruptive with the capitalist system.

Syriza², a political movement, managed to capture a part of these forces and hopes. It did so, under the pretence that by accessing political power, within the current institutional framework, it would make them real. After the legislative elections of January 25, 2015, it came to power³. But to do so, in order to respect the system's name of the game, it allied with a nationalist and reactionary party⁴. Six months later, this very same government was signing a new memorandum with international capitalist institutions, that planned - as our comrades from Rocinante explain - "counter-reforms that Right-wing governments had never dared to vote: total rights for bosses to lay off workers, restriction of right to strike, seizure of housing for debts to banks, reduction of pension amounts, increase of VAT up to 100 % on basic food goods. » Just a few days before, 61,31% of people who participated to the referendum to validate these policies, had voted No⁵ !

As libertarian communists we are not among those that will cry treason after having once incensed Syriza and Tsipras. No, Syriza has perfectly played its role: that of politically reformist coalition and in no way revolutionary. Hoping to control capitalist institutions without overturning the system is bound to fail: these institutions are there to guarantee capitalism's continuity, and act along that line only.

Between democracy and capitalism, you'll have to make a choice!

In the Troika's and European governments' eyes, there was no question of negotiating any agreement whatsoever with Syriza, but on the contrary to make him give in to remind to all who leads the world! They couldn't care less for the people, democracy, and discussion, anything that might impede their plans. The only way to impose other choices is through social struggles and the balance of power and counter powers they generate.

¹ www.anarkismo.net

² ΣΥΡΙΖΑ / SYRIZA, Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς / Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás

³ During these, Syriza made for 36,34% of votes ; which is to say 23,21% of voters, with 36,13% abstention.

⁴ The « independent Greeks » (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες / *Anexártiti Éllines*, AN.ΕΛ. ou AN.ΕΛ)

⁵ 38,31% No, 37,51% abstention, 24,18% Yes, based on number of listed voters.

The stakes are staggering and demand that workers and popular movements organise much more efficiently, especially at international level, including support to the Greek people. It must organise from a class perspective, reject capitalism and its components: it is clear today where the minimalist motto « With the Greeks », respectful of the “poll’s verdict” has led us. In that case, are September’s polls less respectful than January 25th’s, and should we support a third memorandum? In our eyes, the question is elsewhere. Yes Syriza has won the January legislative elections, inasmuch as they collected the greater number of votes, as an organization (but far from a “majority” of votes as often claimed in militant circles). But, yes again, it didn’t mean breaking away from capitalism. To refuse the « agreement » imposed on us by capitalist institutions had a very different meaning, hence the call to vote No by anarcho-syndicalist Rocinante organisation. **The way the Greek government – dubbed “radical leftist” by many including among the more revolutionary - trampled referendum expression, shows how big the gap between direct democracy (mandated and revocable representatives) and democracy under capitalism .** To foster the illusion that the first is compatible with the latter means taking the risk of strengthening extreme-right every time there is a disillusion. And these are part of the system!

Strengthening social movements and their autonomy will make them more powerful

The election campaign, and the internal power plays that followed once in office, have taken their toll on many comrades; time, energy, inevitable desertions from the field of social struggles by some lifelong militant comrades. This is a well-known and often-told tale in many countries, with the same observation every time!

The context shows that the Trade Union movement is below expectations. Two aspects can explain this: the alignment (or refusal to confront) of the European Union’s Confederation and its followers with European policy; the sectarianism demonstrated by the World Federation of Unions. These are not the only explanations. The near-absence of any form of autonomous syndicalism in Greece didn’t help. Bureaucracy, fights between fractions, paralyses syndicalism. This is why we support base unions and anarcho-syndicalist collectives such as Rocinante or ESE, who act as independent, alternative and anticapitalist forces. To support social struggles in Greece, we must propose concrete solidarity measures in our unions, in each one of our countries. The first thing to do is communicate about them as widely as possible, then to support them financially and by direct action whenever possible.

We must develop a strong, active, mass solidarity, with the many alternative and self-managed experiences taking place in Greece. Companies have been taken over by workers, self-managed dispensaries created, and popular cultural structures invented, etc. It is far more useful to support these social movements, and help them weigh more heavily in Greek society, than to decide on whom to vote for next elections. It’s on this field, and in the streets, that our comrades can fight extreme-right organisations with the best efficiency. Much more efficiently than by delegating the people’s power, leaving tens of thousands bitter and disgruntled.

European Union, to leave or not to leave the union... what is the question?

A part of political forces is keen on refocusing debate on the sole issue of “leaving, or not the euro”. To discuss this while pretending to respect the current European or States’ institutional frameworks doesn’t make any sense. By ways of treaties, funding modalities, the very institutional game, the EU deprives peoples of any possibility of choice. Except by breaking away with all this. Reformism has no space! Concerning the issue of the euro, there are three main tendencies:

Those in favour a free market put the « German model » forward, but stay silent about the way German exports were boosted by an aggressive social: lowered wages, increased poverty and insecurity of a large part of the working classes. They are proposing that we bridge the gap with Germany and to organise a « competitive shock » by a renewal of austerity: wage decline, a lowering of social rights, destruction of public service, massive public allocations to the private sector.

Some propose to abolish the euro and go back to national currencies in order to detain better competitive levers than social lowest bidder: the most reactionary Right-wing movements are first among these, but also a fair number of the more protectionists “Left”, and not against alliances with the extreme-Right. But this would simply mean changing the rules of competition on the global capitalist market.

Contrary to what is usually seen as countries opposing one another, as Germany to Greece, anticapitalists must insist on the common interests that bond popular classes together, everywhere inside the euro zone. This is why we are bound to be of a like mind concerning how we recapture social rights lost in Germany and elsewhere, how we fight against regression everywhere in Europe, with the same idea of international workers’ solidarity.

As libertarian communists we claim that this must be our priority, rather than creating an umpteenth political party fraught with promises, but that won’t find it in itself to question the capitalist system! Likewise, we believe that focusing on “leaving the euro or not” is a trap. As said, this issue has no sense inside a framework imposed by capitalism. Fundamentally, **the main problem the working class is facing is not to know what currency will be used for their monthly wages, but if they will indeed be paid at the end of the month and if they will be enough to feed the family!**

Capitalist institutions are made to serve capitalists!

We are fighting a class war, where two classes struggle because they have diverging interests and ours cannot be defended efficiently if we remain closed in by institutions made to exploit us!

Leaving (or not) the euro, choosing (or not) a currency, defining how exchanges inside a society should be carried out, have nothing to do with a so-called “economical science”, but concern political choices directly linked with the type of society we want. For us, what is at stake is the question of property, of the socialization of production and exchanges, of the distribution of power inside companies, communities, society. This is to say that our ambitions are not compatible with capitalist institutions such as the EU, or tools such as the euro. Our hopes are not to choose « the right European currency » the better to strengthen capitalist exploitation! Reformist recipes cannot be the solutions for the future. If the working class has no country, how then can we still believe that old frontiers, old currencies are still useful?

Our observations, do not lead to the conclusion that “nothing can be done”. This includes the failure of Syriza. On the contrary, we have much on our hands and the capacity to succeed. But this is more demanding than to expect someone else to do it for us... More demanding but so much more exhilarating and effective!

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