

transform!

european network for alternative thinking
and political dialogue

Special Edition focused on the political situation in Greece, in cooperation with *Nicos Poulantzas Institute (NPI)*

After The Greek Elections:

“Let Us All Give A Promise ...”

By Stavros Panagiotidis, NPI

The night of the Greek elections of 17 June punctuated the map of Modern Greek history. For the first time, parties left of the Social democracy receive such as a large percentage (SYRIZA, *Democratic Left* and KKE together 37.5%), and assume the position of the major opposition. The only time something similar has happened in the whole of Greek political history was in 1956 when the political alliance of EDA (*United Democratic Left*) won 25% of the vote and second place. This was just seven years after the Greek Civil War and the defeat of the communists, proving that the Left continues to live in the country and is a political force with very strong social ties. In the next elections in 1961, the percentage of EDA decreased, mainly for two reasons. First, because the then Prime Minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis, uncle of the later Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis (2004-2009), organised a plan of extensive intimidation of left, mostly rural voters and rigging election results, in conjunction with agents of the army, some of whom were the protagonists of the coup that took place six years later. The second reason was that George Papandreou, (the father of later Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou (1981-1989, 1993-1996) and grandfather – also Prime Minister! – George Papandreou (2009-

2011)), with the collaboration of Konstantinos Karamanlis and the US-Embassy had founded his party, the *Center Union*, designed to absorb and weaken the radical social power.

The Election Result: *New Democracy* – A Winner Without Power

Back again in 2012, SYRIZA received 27% (71 seats), while in the previous elections in May received 17% and 4.6% (13 seats) in the 2009 elections. Despite this high percentage it failed to achieve the goal to form the first left government. The *New Democracy* (Conservatives) won the election with 29.66% share, over the course of 18.85% of the elections in May, but still smaller than that of the 2009 elections (34%), which was considered as an electoral defeat. It is telling that despite the unacceptable electoral law, which gives a bonus of 50 parliamentary seats to the first party, regardless its percentage (!), the ND was not able to reach parliamentary majority, winning only 129 out of 300 seats. As the readers of this newsletter already know, the main weapon of ND was terrorizing citizens by threatening that a government with the Left will cancel the Memorandum, the country will exit the Euro and the economy will be destroyed. This was the

only electoral platform of the *New Democracy* (endorsed by the rest of the parties and all major media, coordinating political propaganda against SYRIZA). Thus it became the first party that wins the elections throughout the post-dictatorial period, not on a political project and an optimistic promise, but on the basis of threat and fear. It also became the first party that wins the election with so little acceptance of its ideas. As a former communications specialist wrote: “Most of those who voted for ND, they did so by wrinkling their noses in disgust!”

After the elections of May and the rise of SYRIZA, all parties had talked about the need to revise the Memorandum, and to develop a plan of conflict with the Troika. Similarly, the ND, the Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, who in his first statement did not speak at all about the renegotiation of the Memorandum. It is worth mentioning that the percentage of ND as a result of increased anti-SYRIZA-campaign, managed to rally not only voters of other right-wing parties, but even voters who had supported the PASOK in order not to allow SYRIZA becoming first.

Elections' Polarization: Pro-Memorandum and Anti-Memorandum

PASOK (Social Democrats) lost nearly one percent since the elections of May, decreasing to 12.28% (33 seats) from 44% in 2009 due to the enormous damage caused by its governance and the signing of the Memorandum, losing thus the majority of its voters to SYRIZA. Shortly before the election, the president of PASOK, Evangelos Venizelos announced that his party would launch a process of reinvention, removing all the organs of PASOK except himself, a decision which was accepted by members without reaction due to the political decline of PASOK.

The *Independent Greek's* (*Antimni-moniako*, an emerging right-wing party, resulting from division of the *New Democracy*, with tough positions on foreign policy and immigration and supporting the immediate cancellation of the Memorandum) vote has been pressured by ND but the results have remained high, going from 10.5% to 7.5% (20 seats).

The *Democratic Left* (coming from a split of Synaspismos in 2010) maintained its rates at 6.26% (17 seats). The party throughout the election period put forward the slogan "Stay in the Euro at all costs" and "renegotiation of the Memorandum (as opposed to the proposed cancellation on the part of SYRIZA) and gradual disengagement by 2014", but, anyway, in this year supposedly the Memorandum will expire! Finally, the *Democratic Left* presented itself as a responsible power of the Left (as opposed to the "irresponsible" SYRIZA, who refused to join the government after elections in May), which will guarantee the formation of a government after the elections. However, surveys show that they've lost ¼ of the voters of May to SYRIZA.

The *Communist Party* suffered a huge crash, losing half of the votes of May and dropped from 8.5% to 4.5% (12 seats). Like other small extra-parliamentary left alliances, the percent-

age of it dissipated due to the dynamic that developed SYRIZA and the prospect of a left government which charmed the traditional left-wing voters. The CP has paid the consequences of sectarian policies and the refusal of any cooperation with other left forces, the features of which are captured in the phrase of its Secretary: "We are not leftists, we're communists!" Thus they refused to cooperate with SYRIZA, accusing it of not supporting an exit from the EMU (although this claim disagrees with the vast majority of Greek society) – and of being a party which agrees with the system and endorses a new social democracy! It is indicative that the interpretation of election results by the side of the CP is that "we told the truth to the people and we have paid!"

Last we left the case of neo-Nazi party *Golden Dawn*, whose rates remained high at 7% (18 seats). Readers of the newsletter had the chance to read in the previous issue an analysis of this phenomenon. The article vindicated that the stabilizing influence of GD is based on very real trends in Greek society, which have been even strengthened after the attack of a member of GD on TV against women candidates of the Left. The election result has encouraged its followers to engage in previous days in a series of actions, indicative of their inhuman ideology, such as knife attacks against immigrants and the destruction of SYRIZA stands.

The Characteristics of Voting for SYRIZA

The qualitative characteristics of SYRIZA voters are extremely interesting. According to one survey, the alliance comes first in the preferences of private employees (19%), civil servants (22%), self-employed (18%), unemployed (22%) and students (20%). It is fourth power among farmers (9%) and third power among housewives (15%) and pensioners (11%). The latter not changing easily their electoral behaviour, both because of their age and their fear that a government of the Left would

lead the country out from the Eurozone and they will lose their – already low – pensions, having apparently come to terms with the idea of living in poverty, with only the absolutely necessary resources. Also, SYRIZA comes first among graduates of higher and secondary education, as well as in the age groups of 18-34 (33%) and 35-54 (34%), but second, with half the percentage of ND (20%), in 55+ age group. SYRIZA is first in most major urban areas and in many regions of the province, including the island of Crete where the political forces of the center (PASOK and its predecessors) have had traditionally been assembling their largest percentages since the first decades of the twentieth century.

One of the most remarkable features is the absolute class polarization that emerged in the elections, especially in the region of Attica, where 5.000.000 people live. SYRIZA came first in all the areas populated with people of lower incomes and belonging to proletarian strata, approaching 40% (ND got there percentages of 15%) and second or third in all regions whose inhabitants belong to middle class and higher strata.

The conclusion is that the most dynamic parts of Greek society, whose lives and future prospects are strongly affected by the policies of the Memorandum, supported SYRIZA. This shows the huge success of SYRIZA and the vindication of its efforts to express their interests, as well as the enormous class polarization existing in Greek society and the great potential that SYRIZA has.

The Next Day

After the elections, SYRIZA announced firmly that the party respects the election results and will not participate in any government formation process, since there is a political chasm between it and the *New Democracy*. A government with the participation of SYRIZA, who supports the immediate cancellation of the Memorandum, along with ND and PASOK, whose leaders have guaranteed to sign that they will

fulfil the terms of the Memorandum, may not have any luck and it would mean a cancellation of SYRIZA's political agenda. SYRIZA pledged that it will use its position to finally have a real major opposition in the country, rather than the situation until now, where ND and PASOK had the same positions and pretended to disagree. The oppositional action of SYRIZA will be substantial and radical (as long as this government is in office). The party will be at the side of the people in their struggle against the policy of the Memorandum, which the new government will continue. And it will be calling on the government to use – although it estimates that it will not happen – the high percentage of the left opposition as an additional bargaining tool against the Troika.

The tasks undertaken by SYRIZA are both important and difficult. Apart from the continuing demonstration of the real character of the new government and participating in organizing large political events and protests, the left coalition is asked to do basically three things.

First, lead to greater awareness among even more of its voters. The vote in SYRIZA is of economic type, in the sense described before, the concentration of low income earners in SYRIZA and of the better earning in ND. But it is not a class vote, in the sense of con-

sciousness of voters on the social division of labour, their own position within it and the need for collective organisation.

Second, it has to establish organisational ties with the people who voted for SYRIZA, a significant part of which is fascinated by the idea of political participation. SYRIZA promised a more democratic and participatory governance model, "to return power to the people" as Alexis Tsipras said. This should apply in the interior of SYRIZA at first and the way leading to it passes through the transformation of the left coalition into a united, massive and modern Party of the Left, where all the people, who came to the open meetings of SYRIZA the previous times and discussed with the executives of the party and Tsipras the program of the left alliance, will be actively involved. This is the only way for SYRIZA to be even more effective at understanding the problems of people, the social processes taking place, to have more political and social visions to compose and thus to further strengthen the program with material that will make it more detailed, convincing and powerful.

The third task of SYRIZA, as well as the previous two, is encapsulated in the phrase from the speech of Alexis Tsipras (<http://www.left.gr/article.php?id=2812>)

at the election night in the central pavilion of SYRIZA in Athens, in front of hundreds of members and friends of SYRIZA, whose flags and songs gave the signal for the start of a new era:

"Let us all give a promise. To continue giving all the power and vitality of our souls to support our fellow men in need. SYRIZA has to become a force that will support networks of social solidarity. To not leave any poor and unemployed people without electricity and healthcare. Together with our struggles to pave way for the democratization of political life and especially to give the promise that without conceit and arrogance, with the humility that characterizes those who are fighting for the right of ordinary people, to transform our coalition into a great democratic, popular left-wing party that will unite the Greeks in the great struggle to regain our country's sovereignty, independence and social justice and to get democracy back to its homeland and all over Europe. The future is ours and lasts long. We are determined to win."

The following slogans, flags pulsated with passion and the pride that shone in the eyes of the members of SYRIZA for the great struggle we give for the victory of the people were our commitment that we give this promise and will keep it to the end.

A New Chapter In French Politics

By Elisabeth Gauthier, *Espaces Marx*

For the first time since ten years the government of France is led by the PS (*Parti Socialiste*) again. In 2002, the *Gauche Plurielle* government and its then candidate Jospin encountered catastrophic results due to the public's massive dissatisfaction with their politics. When it became clear that they could not even proceed past the first ballot, the way was paved for a run-off between Le Pen

and Chirac. Now, for the first time since Francois Mitterand's resignation in 1995, the French president is a social democrat again. Because of the strength of the Left in local and regional committees, the French senate has a left majority for the first time in the history of the 5th Republic. Basically all the important institutional reins of power are now held by PS-representatives.

Record-breaking 44% of non-voters strongly indicate the delegitimation of political representation.

The French political system clearly enforces a two-party-system: the primacy of the presidential election, a majority vote system without any proportionality and the permanent pressure of voting 'usefully' for one of the major parties already in the first ballot contribute to this fact.

80% of the seats in the senate and parliament are held by representatives of the two major parties – a further proof of the necessity of establishing a 6th Republic, as proposed by the *Front de Gauche* (FdG).

The election results are contradictory, though. In about 90% of the 577 constituencies the FdG won more votes than the candidates of the PCF (*Parti communiste français*) in the last elections (6.9% on average as opposed to 4.5% in 2007) and had above-average results especially in the bigger cities. At the same time the PS could increase their votes drastically and even surpass deputies of the FdG who are generally thoroughly successful (30%), such as Jean Luc Mélenchon in a constituency in the North (21%). As a result, along with its allies the PS achieved an absolute majority (316 MPs) even without the Greens (17 MPs) and the FdG (10MPs). This had been Aubry's declared objective and a major factor in the failure of a joint candidature of the Left in areas with a high FN (*Front National*)-voter potential. The FdG lost many votes (J.L. Mélenchon scored about 4 million votes in the presidential elections) as their supporters either decided to go for the PS (about 33%) or refused to ballot in the first place. The nationwide promotion of J.L. Mélenchon as a candidate in the presidential elections could not be repeated for parliamentary elections, which are traditionally split up in constituencies. The Greens could only increase their votes in areas supported by the PS while they stagnated in the other constituencies. The radical Left made hardly an appearance.

On the Right, the UMP (*Union pour un mouvement populaire*, 229 seats) and the Democratic Movement (*MoDem*, 2 seats) lost seats. Two FN-deputies (among them Jean-

Marie le Pen's granddaughter) and a representative of the extreme Right on the other hand will enter parliament owing to results in the South, where their influence is exceedingly strong. All fractions of the Right prepare for their role as the opposition and speculate on a coming disillusion. The FN aims for a new composition of the crisis-stricken Right and attempts to play a central role in this process as to gain dominance within the movement for the 2017 elections. Within the UMP a debate is likely to evolve: will they clearly reject any advances of the FN or form strategic alliances? The UMP's rightward shift induced by Sarkozy implies the latter.

How will the PS handle its new power? Never before were there so many possibilities to fight the oligarchy's dominance both in France and Europe. According to his program, Hollande aims at correcting the prevailing logic without questioning the very foundation it is based upon. The full force of the European crisis is yet to strike France, it is feared that the worst is still to come. Already on the first day after elections the talk is about 'necessary efforts' and 'sacrifices', which – other than in the era Sarkozy – should be 'distributed justly'. The French president massively interfered with the elections in Greece by appealing to Greek voters for a so-called 'pro-Euro'-decision and subsequently complimented them on the outcome. Despite his pro-growth discourse, Hollande has not shown any signs of rejecting austerity policy with regard to the EU-summit at the end of June with bank union, budget union and political federalism high up on the agenda.

For the FdG the conditions for a participation in the government are not given. They see themselves as a part of the left majority in parliament, however, not as a part of the

governing majority.* The committed Left will have to focus on building as much pressure as possible within and outside of institutions in order to induce a shift to the left. Here, issues such as the structure of the European Union, wages and social standards, employment, the public sector and democracy will be crucial. A further development of the FdG's program 'L'Humain d'abord' (*People first*) with the involvement of networks and task-forces founded in the election campaign is also planned. In their campaign, Hollande and the PS hardly attempted to shift political hegemony to the left but rather concentrated on the desire for getting rid of Sarkozy. Mélenchon's campaign on the other hand emphasised certain left-wing issues which now need to be further developed. A failure of the social democratic presidency and government would not merely have horrendous economic and social consequences but also lead to a political catastrophe and the strengthening of the extreme Right. The Left is faced with the challenge of creating a well-functioning and credible socio-political alternative.

A further developing of the FdG is desired by its organised as well as non-organised activists, however, it will take a lot of discussion and experimenting to find feasible ways for the future. The single parties which constitute the FdG will also need to continue along this path as to contribute to a new dynamic of the movement.

**The nomination of the former PCF-member and party-leader Robert Hue (who supported Hollande from the very beginning) as a government member must be interpreted as an individual decision.*

Trade Union Assembly Resolution from Rio:

“Fighting For An Alternative Development Model”

By Asbjørn Wahl*

An impatient Trade Union Assembly in Rio on 11-13 June adopted a statement which represents an important step forward, in which it realises “that our current profit-driven production and consumption model, identified as the source of rising social inequalities and environmental degradation, must be replaced if a truly sustainable development is to be achieved”.

It further demanded that “the Commons, natural and energy resources are brought and kept under public ownership, securing their public preservation and administration with social control”.

In order to replace the existing model, the trade union movement must play “a decisive role in fighting for an alternative development model for our societies, grounded on peoples’ needs, on solidarity, on economic democracy and on a fair distribution of wealth”.

In this struggle, the trade union movement must “make use of our organisational capacity and our experience of past struggles to form a strong, organised global movement in a bid to spur governments and corporations, who are reluctant to act, into taking appropriate measures to tackle and stop climate change”.

This is something to live up to!

Find the **entire statement** here:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/assemblyresolution_eng_tc_rev.pdf

** The author is Adviser of the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees and Chair of the Working Group on Climate Change of the International Transport Workers’ Federation*

The text is from the ESF mailing list.

Subscribe to the **transform!** newsletter

The *transform!* newsletter is published monthly and is a free e-mail service of our network, delivered directly to your inbox. To sign up just send an e-mail to: office@transform-network.net or refer to our website. In case you want to unsubscribe also send an e-mail to: office@transform-network.net