

Lessons from the Greek Debacle: A Left Euro-Skepticism or a Left Popular Front against the EU?

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The recent Greek elections (25/9/2015) offer some valuable lessons for not only the Greek Left and the popular movement. SYRIZA – the darling of the Western Left that has been portrayed as a model – performed a blatant somersault and unashamedly betrayed the popular expectations that brought it to government. SYRIZA began as a left euro-skeptic party that disputed the neoliberal and austerity policies of European Union (EU), questioned aspects of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and promised that there can be an alternative within the EU. It banked on people's disgust with EU's structural adjustment programs but also on its fear of exiting from this trap without a clear and convincingly delineated alternative. The end result is now well known. After almost six months of theatrical gestures SYRIZA – faced with the unyielding position of the EU – capitulated unconditionally betraying even the vociferous popular NO to EU's blackmail expressed in the referendum of the 5th of July.

On top of that SYRIZA added insult to the injury by blackmailing the Greek people to vote for it in the 25th of September elections: this time not as a reformer of EU's policies but as the milder facilitator of its policies. The results of these recent elections show clearly the limits of euro-skepticism and how it can easily betray the popular cause.

The global capitalist crisis of 2007-8 is the first big crisis of the 21st century. Its outbreak upset further the unequal development of the world capitalist system and aggravated intra-imperialist conflicts between its main poles.

The structural crisis of the Eurozone (and the rest of the EU as the former represents the hard core of the latter) is one of the main regional crises that ensued in the aftermath of the global crisis. It denotes the internal and external problems of one of the main challengers of US global hegemony. EU's dominant powers – the euro-core countries – reacted by unloading a great portion of the crisis' burden on the dominated sub-imperialisms of the euro-periphery; thus aggravating the crisis of the latter further. The imposition in many of the latter of restructuring policies – particularly through adjustment programs by troikas – has dramatically exacerbate class tensions in these countries, as distinct from the euro-core countries where restructuring is milder.

The aforementioned difference has some critical political implications and creates a political North – South divide in Europe – on top of the economic one. In the euro-core countries it is the extreme right-wing and even neo-fascist parties that benefit from the crisis. On the contrary, in most of the euro-periphery countries it is parties to the left of social-democracy that gain support. The main reason for this political divide is that in the euro-core countries

the Left (social-democracy excluded since it is a systemic force) has faced successive defeats that weakened it and in the end made it an appendage to social-democracy. Moreover, as the European imperialist integration and the EU is the system's major long-standing project, the Left in the euro-core countries has become integrated in this. For this reason it cannot attract the popular discontent with the EU and its anti-popular structures and policies. For this reason it is the extreme Right – till recently outside the official political spectrum – that can deceive the popular masses and, with the implicit or explicit support of segments of the bourgeoisie, lead them to the slippery road of nationalism.

On the contrary, in most euro-periphery countries – apart from those of the now defunct Eastern bloc that has tarnished the name of socialism – the Left has remained outside the political mainstream. Thus it kept its militant traditions and is, too a great extent, against (or skeptic) regarding the European imperialist integration. For this reason it is the Left and left popular and social movements that are the main vehicles of popular discontent against the EU.

This peculiarity of the Euro-South has not gone unnoticed by EU's hegemonic imperialist countries and the domestic bourgeoisies. In Greece the open declaration by systemic mouthpieces of the need to put 'an end to the Greek specificity' is a typical example. Thus the system resorts to a two-pronged attack. On the one hand it attacks directly the Left and popular movements and attempts to discredit them as irresponsible that endanger the 'European paradise on earth'. This course proceeds through fear and intimidation and attempts to subdue the popular discontent against the EU.

On the other hand, the system attempts to incorporate this discontent by channeling it to euro-skeptic but not anti-EU parties and political formations. The recent proliferation of euro-skeptic fractions and formations is tantamount to that. These formations dispute aspects of the European imperialist integration and even go against the EMU. But they shy away from denouncing the EU altogether. SYRIZA is a typical example of this slippery road. It shows how euro-skepticism cannot soften EU's anti-popular structures and policies but it can diffuse – at least for a period – the popular discontent.

Left euro-skepticism argues that it EU is not an anti-popular structure per se but it has been dominated by neoliberalism. It consciously hides that EU's – and European Economic Community's before – policies were anti-labor before the onset of neoliberalism in the 1980s. It also consciously conceals the fact that EU is a structure based on specific powers and interests and not the 'common European house'. If these interests are endangered their agents will prefer to demolish the structure rather than alter it. Euro-skepticism begins with the myth that there can be non-austerity and pro-labor policies within the EU. When this myth is challenged then euro-skepticism moves hesitantly to dispute the EMU but not the EU.

This latter proposal is also a blind alley. Particularly for the euro-periphery countries it is nonsensical to leave the EMU and remain in the EU. This is the worst scenario from all. It means that you require a consensual divorce while remaining a dominated part of the wider structure. As shown in the Greek case, the only way this can happen is through a Schauble plan that moves a country to a currency zone depending on the euro (like the Exchange Rate Mechanism II (ERM II)) while remaining under implicit and explicit austerity Memoranda. In this scenario the dominated country ends up with additional burden instead of being liberated.

Euro-skepticism is an easy 'opponent' for the system. It lulls the popular movement that a smooth course is achievable and, when this is disproved, it throws it into disarray and submission. Again the Greek debacle is a typical example of that. On the one hand, SYRIZA played its treacherous game. And, on the other hand, the Left –despite being anti-EU – failed to create a mass popular movement against the EU that would offer immediate practical solutions to people's problems and grievances. The Left, and particularly the militant extra-parliamentary Left (as expressed by ANTARSYA) openly and honestly declared its opposition to the EU. However, it failed to organize this as a coherent and practical project and as a political proposal for the toiling popular masses.

This lesson has to be learned; particularly by the Greek Left. SYRIZA's betrayal and its open implementation of a third even more anti-popular and recessionary austerity program are already fomenting popular anger. This was not expressed in the last elections but it is already simmering as the new measures erode further popular income and increase poverty and immiseration. If the Left fails to create a mass popular socio-political anti-EU front that will gather the popular discontent then it might be a polished extreme Right that will hijack it and channel it back into the system.

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