

Editorial

The victory of Syriza in the Greek general election of 25 January was, by any standards, an historic event. At last! At last! After decades of right wing and neo-liberal domination, including under the guise of ‘mainstream’ labour and social democracy, there was a government of the radical left in Europe, a government committed to ending the brutal austerity which had inflicted so much suffering on the people of Greece, the people of Ireland, and to a greater or lesser extent, all the people of Europe.

Syriza’s rise was as dramatic as Pasok’s fall, from a marginal 4.6 percent and 13 seats in 2009 to 36.3 percent and 149 seats today compared to Pasok’s 43.9 percent and 160 seats in 2009 to 4.7 percent and 13 seats now. Looking back we can see that the decisive shift in public opinion, ie the consciousness of the working class, came in the period 2009-12 which were years of epic resistance by the Greek people including numerous general strikes, great street demonstrations and occupations of squares and workplaces. Clearly the stunning result of 25 January was, first and foremost, a product of and tribute to those struggles.

Not surprisingly Syriza’s win was greeted with euphoria by the Irish left, and indeed much of the left across Europe. The idea that this is an example we can and should follow is an obvious and perfectly reasonable conclusion and clearly, with the spectacular rise of Podemos in Spain, the notion that the tide is turning and that the whole political complexion of Europe might be shifting leftwards is highly attractive. To hear Alexis Tsipras proclaim the ‘the age of austerity is over’ and that ‘the troika is dead’ was music to the ears of millions.

Unfortunately things are not proving

that simple and, indeed they were never going to be. The IMF, the ECB and the EU Commission, are not just a collection of nasty neo-liberal ideologues or a bunch of unpleasant people, they are economic and political representatives of European and international capital and of the respective ruling classes. They are both hugely powerful and utterly ruthless. For appearances sake they will acknowledge the ‘democratic will’ of the Greek people but the idea that they will actually respect it or easily bow to it is fanciful. Moreover, they have a massive vested interest in not doing so because they are as aware as we are of the logic of Greece gaining serious concessions, namely that Spain, Ireland, Portugal etc can then say us too.

Syriza’s strategy of refusing to recognise the Troika and negotiating instead with individual governments may have been effective political theatre but changed nothing fundamental because the Merkels, Camerons, Hollandes and Rajoys are no less representatives of the 1 percent, the bourgeoisie, than Christian Lagarde or Mario Draghi. And Yanis Varoufakis, Syriza’s ‘rock star’ Minister of Finance may indeed be ‘super -cool’ and a Professor of game-theory but the hope that Merkel or Draghi can be ‘charmed’ or ‘tricked’ or ‘bluffed’ is another illusion. This does not mean it is impossible to defeat them or force them to make concessions but it will depend on power and the capacity to mobilise real social forces, more clever negotiating ploys.

As this article is being written (17 February) the ‘game’, in reality ‘the struggle’, has yet to run its course, and the picture is changing on a daily, even hourly basis and it is impossible to know exactly what the outcome will be or how things

will stand by the time this issue is published or read. But at the moment there are serious danger signs.

On the one hand the Troika are playing hardball and are being backed up various European governments including Rajoy of Spain and, shamefully, the Irish government. It might have been hoped that the Spanish and Irish governments would have sympathised with the Greek case in the expectation that the respective people's might be next in line for a debt write down but, of course, they fear that if Syriza's is seen to win anything substantial their own strategy of abject compliance will stand clearly exposed and condemned.

On the other hand Tsipras and Varoufakis, while rejecting the proposals currently on offer and, so far, insisting on not renewing the bail-out on 28 February are no less vehemently insisting that there will be a deal and that they won't leave the eurozone. Even from the standpoint of game-theory this looks problematic - a bit like haggling over the price of rug in the bazaar while assuring the vendor that you are going to buy in the end. And from the standpoint of class struggle it is not really preparing the Greek people for fight if a deal is not struck.

Of course some sort of a deal may be done in the next week or so but that doesn't mean it will be good one for the Greek people and that has the potential to be very demoralising in the long run, especially if it leaves Syriza still implementing austerity in all but name.

Standing back from the immediate drama of the negotiations over the debt to look at the longer term prospects for the Syriza government also reveals serious challenges ahead. As James O'Toole's article in this issue shows the record of left

governments in the past is littered with pitfalls and difficulties. The hope has to be that the election victory will raise the confidence and fighting spirit of the Greek working class and thus unleash a powerful wave of struggle - as happened in France in 1936 and Chile in 1970-72. The danger is that 'loyalty' to 'our government' will be used as an argument 'not to rock the boat' and thus to demobilize people which will actually play into the hands of the right wing and ruling class forces inside Greece, including the Greek state and the Nazis of Golden Dawn, none of whom have gone away.

The fact is that Tsipras and Varoufakis, despite much flamboyant rhetoric, have made it clear that they intend to manage capitalism not overthrow it. As Varoufakis has put it 'it is the Left's historical duty, at this particular juncture, to stabilize capitalism; to save European capitalism from itself' ¹ This does not auger well and is of a piece with the Syriza's deal with the right wing and racist ANEL (Independent Greeks) and their obnoxious leader Panos Kammenos. This deal was both unnecessary and unfortunate; unnecessary because Syriza was in a strong position to form a minority government challenging the KKE (Greek Communist Party)² and others to vote down their pro-working class measures; unfortunate because it gives the reactionary Kammenos, now Minister of Defence, the opportunity to liaise with the, very right wing, armed forces and stir up all sorts of nationalist mischief with Turkey and in the eastern Mediterranean.

But despite these very real problems, there is still everything to play for. For revolutionary socialists the key to the situation remains the mass mobilization of the Greek working class and its allies in-

¹Cited by Michael Robertson his blog.<https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2015/02/10/yanis-varoufakis-more-erratic-than-marxist/>

²For information on the Greek Communists see the article in this issue by Nikos Lountos.

cluding its international allies, especially the people of Spain and Ireland. In the weeks and months ahead the eyes of every Irish socialist and many Irish people will be on Greece and the question of solidarity with Greece will be high on the agenda, with the understanding that the best form of solidarity we can deliver is to defeat our own government and its austerity here which, of course, raises the issue of the water charges.

Water Charges - the struggle continues

The battle against the water charges remains the lightning rod for the whole struggle against austerity in Ireland. The massive mobilizations of October 11, November 1 and December 10 2014 rocked the government back on its heels, won major concessions making it very difficult to enforce payment, and so altered the political landscape as to open up the possibility, at least, of a Sinn Fein led 'left' government.

However, the Christmas break created an unavoidable loss of momentum and this was compounded by the unwillingness of the trade union component of Right2Water to call a national demonstration in Jan-

uary. Despite this the Dublin Says No and community groups demonstrations of 31 January were still large (20,000 or so in Dublin, 5000 in Cork and so on) and militant and proof that this movement is still moving.

At the same time the government has launched an offensive against the campaign, both in terms of extensive propaganda and the large scale arrests (on absurd charges of false imprisonment) of those who had the temerity to block Joan Burton's car in Jobstown. The aim is clearly to demonize activists and intimidate potential protestors. Nevertheless the government remains on the back foot in terms of the large number of people refusing to register with Irish Water or pay the charges.

In the present situation achieving the largest and widest possible mobilization for the next national demonstration on 21 March is essential in order to counter the demonisation, regain the momentum and reinforce people's confidence for non-payment. International solidarity, particularly with Greece, and unity can also be a significant theme on the 21st which is also UN Anti-Racism Day when there will be marches in Greece, UK and many other countries.

- John Molyneux