

An Antarsya Activist Talks to New Politics about the Syriza Government in Greece



New Politics interviewed Iannis Delatolas, an art photographer, a founding member of the Greek Solidarity Movement (AKNY), and a supporter of Antarsya and of the International Socialist Tendency. He has been involved in the antifascist solidarity movement with Greece and in struggles for LGBTQ rights, abortion rights, in anti-war activities, and in other social justice causes.

New Politics – Iannis, why did Syriza do so well in the elections? To what do you attribute such a strong victory?

Iannis Delatolas – Syriza's electoral victory is part of a massive shift to the left in Greek Society since the crisis and the memoranda begun. Not only did Syriza get 36.3% of the vote but the combined vote for all the left parties, Syriza, KKE and Antarsya nationally is at 42.56%. In the traditionally "red" working class areas of Athens the combined vote is even higher. In electoral districts "B Athens" it is at 45.1% and "B Piraeus" the combined vote for the Left is at 51.2%. In effect what this means is the end of the social democrats of Pasok and possibly also of the conservative New Democracy party, as voters punished both for the misery and destruction they brought on to Greek society. At the same time this massive leftward shift is a tremendous opening for the radical left in Greece and points to the potential not just for pushing back austerity and restoring pre memoranda wages and

social spending, but to the opening for a more radical break and rupture with Capitalism. What the Left does in Greece will reverberate across the globe. And here come a lot of responsibilities and critical moments ahead.

New Politics – How do you feel about Antarsya's showing?

Delatolas – Antarsya doubled its votes since the last election. These 40,000 votes are a clear anticapitalist vote. Antarsya's strength lies in its ability to argue a radical and confrontational anticapitalist policy in the movements, the labor unions and the movements for social justice in general. Antarsya's influence reaches far beyond its electoral appeal. It is understandable that people voted Syriza to make sure the memoranda parties did not make a comeback. Some of our periphery voted for Syriza or the KKE, but the significance of Antarsya is that it can unify into common action a substantial section of activists—most importantly with an anticapitalist and revolutionary daily practice and long term goal. As the bankers and the EU fight back against Syriza's gradual and moderate reversals of memorandum austerity, this anticapitalist perspective of a break with the Euro will become more important. Let's not forget that the Left Platform in Syriza agrees with Antarsya on the need for a Grexit, nationalization of the banks and workers control. So in that sense Antarsya's role has been crucial in being a crystal clear anticapitalist political front.

New Politics – What are the various possibilities for Syriza forming a coalition? What are the relative assets and liabilities of the various coalition partners? There have been some reports that Syriza may be considering a coalition with the rightist Independent Greeks party, what do you know about that? What do you think of it? Would Antarsya be willing to be part of a Syriza coalition government?

Delatolas – This has already been decided. Unfortunately an

alliance with the other left party of the working class was not achieved. Some responsibility lies here with Syriza's pro-Euro position; Syriza is the only left party with a pro Euro stance. Also with the refusal of the KKE to work with any other left party, a symptom of sectarianism but negotiations and pressure might have produced some type of conditional alliance. This was not attempted as Tsipras met first with the Independent Greeks (ANEL) right away and a deal was struck very fast. The alliance with ANEL has been quite some time in the making. It is an unfortunate choice as ANEL is a far right party with racism, homophobia, nationalism and anti-Turkish policies at its core. It would be the equivalent of UK Independence Party in the United Kingdom. Also the party has ties to the shipping magnates, so questions come up now about this government's sustainability long term. And also, we have to ask, how will this impair Syriza's ability to roll back the austerity it was voted in office to do?

New Politics – Syriza has said that it will be a hard negotiator with the Troika. What is the current Syriza economic proposal and what is the likelihood of it being accepted?

Delatolas – Well this has yet to be determined. Since the 2012 elections, Syriza has retreated from the “cancelation of memoranda” to negotiating down the debt. Giorgos Stathakis said at one time that 95% of the debt was “legitimate,” yet a few days ago talk was of a 50% haircut and then some retreat even from that... It is unclear if Syriza will be confrontational enough since it keeps saying that it will not leave the Euro. This is tantamount to giving away one's best bargaining chip. Without putting up a fight, this single non-exit from the Euro position makes negotiating much harder, even inside the parameters that Syriza has set up as its political boundaries.

New Politics – Syriza came out of social movements of labor unions and communities, but the wave of activism of the last

few years decline in the recent past. What do you see as the future of the labor and social movements? What needs to be done to revive them?

Delatolas – Yes, the nearly insurrectional character of 2012 confrontations is not with us today. But we have to keep in mind that 34 General strikes have brought down 4 governments since 2008. So we are talking here about a very militant and unrelenting movement of resistance, maybe more focused in smaller pockets of resistance in the last year or so, such as the ERT workers and the 595 cleaners who were just rehired by the new government. They had become a beacon of resistance. They even came out in support of the Gay Pride last summer. The fact that one of the first things the government did was to rehire them points to the importance of a sustained militancy. They've slept on the sidewalk outside the ministry of Finance since 2013 and faced assaults by the riot police and the neo-nazis (I will come back to the police-nazi axis in a bit). It is also important to look into the role of Syriza unionists, as well as of the KKE, has played in voting against 2 day and longer strikes, maybe as part of the limitations that electoralism can impose on radical left parties such as Syriza.

New Politics – One of the most serious political problems on the ground in Greece is that the police force has been infiltrated by the ultra-rightwing Golden Dawn Party. What will Syriza do to deal with this problem? What does Antarsya think needs to be done?

Delatolas – Golden Dawn is not a simply “ultra-right” party. It is an openly Neo-Nazi party. They operate or did before the antifascist movement curtailed their power for the time being, with storm trooper-like formations of thugs that would go out looking for immigrants and LGBT people, anarchists and socialists to beat and in some cases murdered them. Half their leadership is in jail awaiting trial on charges of running a criminal organization. There has been a delay in these

trials. We intend to mobilize and pressure the new government to move and to try their leadership for these crimes. They have been arrested and due to a very small team of lawyers who work pro bono, are now facing charges for their role in orchestrating some of the attacks against migrants, but also for their role on the murder of antifa rap artist Pavlos Fyssas. The two Golden Dawn members who murdered Pakistani immigrant Shahzad Luqman were sent to jail for life, the first time such murders have been punished. This is the first in Greek history. However the fight against fascism in Greece is far from over. More mobilizations are needed such as the upcoming March 21 International Day Against Fascism. We plan to organize an action here in New York and possibly in other US cities.

New Politics – When left governments come to power—that is to the left of the Social Democrats—they often face the danger of a military coup. What has Syriza done to win over either part of the top military officers or to organize within the army to win the rank-and-file soldiers from their officers? What is Antarsya's position on the question of the Army?

Delatolas – Here I would have to defer to comrade Stathis Kouvelakis who is in the Central Committee of Syriza. As he mentioned in an article recently, there do not seem to be the types of networks in the army that could lead to a military threat on the left at this time. Of course that may change in the future. But for the time being a bigger threat comes from the police force and the sections of the judiciary. As you mentioned, more than half of the police are infiltrated by the Golden Dawn. It is far more likely that this toxic alliance of the fascists and these sections of the state can become a real threat in the future. Unfortunately days before the election Syriza put out a press release addressing the police. In that statement, they reneged on a demand of the movement to disarm and dissolve the riot police and the Delta force, known for their racism and brutality, as well for their being a solid

electoral voting bloc for Golden Dawn. Alexis Tsipras had already made references to this in the past. Obviously a challenge to the bourgeois State will require more radical circumstances but nevertheless Syriza's not dissolving the Riot Police right away may cause problems for our side down the line.

New Politics – What will be Antarsya's goals under a Syriza government? What will be your attitude toward the government? To what degree would you be willing to defend it against the right? To what degree will you challenge it?

Delatolas – We plan to support the measures that benefit the workers and impoverished strata. We will be a left opposition to keep pushing the Syriza government to the left. And for the first time since the 1930's a left government is in office. That does not mean that the left has the power yet. That is an important difference. Syriza will still have to work inside the confines of capitalism and the bourgeois state. But we will not stop there. We hope to work with comrades and anticapitalists from all the left parties and movements and fight for an exit from the Euro and cancellation of the debt as opposed to just a "haircut." And we have no illusions on reforming the EU as the leadership of Syriza proclaims. We expect head on collisions with the bankers and the EU. The Greek workers did not fight all these years and bring Syriza to power for a "light" version of austerity. But we must be aware both of the dangers and the hope we inherit from the ashes of the memoranda parties of New Democracy and PASOK.