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Greece & the crisis

Seeds of Hope

Kostas Avrimidis

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There is no doubt that the political history of Greece is full of oppression and political struggle – from dictatorships to political prosecutions, jailings, exiles, shootings, torture, civil war, and countless strikes, demonstrations, occupations and protests that are put down by extreme state violence.

But no matter how much the people are trying their best, again and again they end up falling short of pulling off a full scale revolution, even though the potential to do so is there – or so it appears.

In my opinion there are two main reasons for this: Firstly, the massive patronising of the people by the political parties and especially by the parties of the left and secondly, the lack of political education of the people that will help them to build political thought and judgement.

But now it appears, for the very first time, that things may have changed. It seems that in recent times many more people don't buy the rhetoric of the parties and they are beginning to try to understand politics for themselves. One of the big stumbling blocks that remains is the lack of political education – in that it should have started at least 3 decades back, so that

when people came across the current political and social situation they would have been able to cope relatively easily. This did not happen so people are trying to understand so much in so short a time.

Another very important aspect of the current political climate is the grassroots campaigns that have been built by communities of people that lead the way outside the influence of political parties. It's worth mentioning a few of them. Starting with Keratea, where a town of 16,000 people, situated southeast of Athens, are opposing en masse the decision of the state to build a huge open dump to accommodate Athens city's needs in the near by archaeological site of Ovriokastro. The beauty of the villagers' struggle is the manner in which they have organised – direct democracy- and the length of time, militancy and effort that they have put into fighting the campaign.

All of this has occurred in the face of massive pressure from the state with hundreds of riot police attacking people with tear gas and beating them with clubs. They have faced media dismissal – mostly pretending that is not happening at all, and a great deal of mocking when their struggle is commented on at all. Nevertheless the people of Keratea are still winning.

Another battle of significance is the struggles of small communities in Northern Greece, and more specifically in the 'counties' of Chalkidiki and Komotini where people are opposing on health and environmental grounds the extraction of gold which was found in their areas. Again they have had to face a massive campaign against them by the media – both state owned and private – and they have had to balance things between the dilemma of the potential job creation- in areas of Greece with the highest unemployment and emigration for decades now – and serious health and environmental concerns.

Again their tactics of choice have been mass mobilisation of communities, open public meetings, demonstrations, the closure of main road arteries – and all these from people with lit-

tle or no experience in political struggle. In the face of all this they have managed substantial victories, built political awareness for themselves and set an example for other campaigns.

Another very different but nevertheless very empowering campaign is the refusal of payment of motorway tolls, that has created a movement of thousands of people actively involved from all walks of life in defiance of the private companies that operate the tolls and the state. This campaign is amazing both in its strength and in the general knowledge and understanding of the purpose behind it. What we have here is the state assigning the construction of massive motorways to private companies and giving them the right to levy enormous amounts of tolls on the people using them – Direct private taxation on the public with the blessings of the state!

Last but not least is the Real Democracy Now movement, with the mass occupation of town squares that ignited like fire from town to town all over Greece and gave hope to people in a society where people have started to realise, to an extent, that parties and unions are not going to deliver the goods for them and that the social and political problems that they are facing have to be resolved in a more “DIY” manner.

One of the main problems of Greek politics and culture, quoting from an old comrade that has followed things for the best part of the last 50 years is “institutionalised misery”. No matter how cornered people become, the vast majority of them stop short of doing something about it by moaning and accepting their fate as if it is predetermined from someone or something from high above. Recently I saw on the back door of a toilet a piece of graffiti that reads “All it takes is one wheel to start a revolution – or a fucking backbone”. That actually is very close to what people are lacking in Greece and indeed in the world in general.

I don’t know if the people in Greece can pull off a full scale uncompromising revolution even though everything at present is heading in the right direction. What is against them is time

— all these movements and campaigns and more, should have started a long time back, from a smaller neighbourhood level and in relatively less pressured times.

But having said that, I'm not implying even for a second that the governments and politicians that have humiliated and continue to humiliate the Greek people so much over all these years will find it easy to maintain their seats and status. One thing is for sure — they will need a whole fleet of helicopters to escape with their lives intact, them and their families, when the shit does hit the fan!