

Serbia: Vučić's electoral defeat ushers in a new era of class struggle

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Rarely have hopes and reality been so far apart as they were on Sunday evening in Belgrade. Following the electoral defeat of the long-standing ruler Aleksandar Vučić, tens of thousands across Serbia celebrated the election result with great enthusiasm. In the capital, the jubilant crowds brought traffic to a standstill in some places.

Two years after the collapse of the railway station canopy in Novi Sad, which triggered a wave of mass protests against corruption and arbitrary rule, the Students' List—which emerged from the protest movement—won Sunday's parliamentary election by a clear margin. It secured just over 53 percent of the vote, while Vučić's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) managed only 39 percent. All other parties failed to win seats in parliament. Voter turnout was exceptionally high at almost 70 percent.

But what happens now? What will the Students' List do with its newly acquired power? It has only a rudimentary answer to this, consisting mainly of pious hopes. In a world characterised by escalating wars, social inequality, the rise of far-right parties and fierce class struggles, it dreams—according to its election manifesto—of “building an organised, fair and developed state where knowledge is valued and the law applies equally to everyone.”

The Students' List has not yet decided on its future government team. Its elected representatives are not students, but professors, doctors, scientists, journalists, artists and other prominent figures. At the top of the electoral list was the professor of medicine, Ilija Srdanović. The government itself is to be composed of “experts.”

Among those being discussed as a possible prime minister is Dejan Šoškić, an economics professor and former head of the Serbian central bank. “Stability, peace and acting in accordance with the law—these are the most important things now in forming a new government,” he

stressed on election night. There would be “no revanchism and no revolution.”

This sums up the program of the Student List. The protest movement is to be channeled into orderly, institutional channels in order to prevent an independent revolutionary development. On this basis, the lofty demands will founder on the rocks of reality. Building a prosperous, just and democratic society free from corruption and exploitation on a capitalist basis is a hopeless utopia, a pipe dream.

Even without Vučić—whose “mafia” remains entrenched in every pore of the state apparatus—Serbia will remain a pawn of the imperialist powers. They had broken Yugoslavia up into seven states in the 1990s so that they could better control and plunder it. With an average monthly salary of €1,035, a statutory minimum wage of €550, youth unemployment at 22 percent and a poverty rate of 20 percent, Serbia ranks among Europe's poorest countries.

The coming period will not be characterised by reconciliation and harmony, but by the outbreak of the class struggle. Either the working class takes the initiative, unites across the Balkans and throughout Europe, and declares war on capitalism, war and exploitation, or the Students' List will give rise to a new “mafia” that exploits the working class and offers itself as a proxy for the European Union (EU), the US or Russia. The Students' List's election manifesto does not even begin to provide an answer to these questions.

The programme consists of 11 points, divided into three sections.

The first section, “Serbia or the Mafia,” promises to combat corruption with the help of the institutions of the bourgeois state—courts freed from political influence, the public prosecutor's office, and the police. The assets of politicians and civil servants are to be investigated, illegally acquired wealth confiscated, and abuse of office

prosecuted. Government contracts, tenders and major projects are to be made public and rigorously scrutinised, while the public broadcaster (RTS) is to undergo far-reaching restructuring.

The second section, “Knowledge is Power,” calls for an end to the system of appointing people on the basis of party membership when filling posts in the public sector. Public sector jobs should be filled exclusively through rigorous, merit-based competition. Schools are to be modernised and textbooks made free for all primary and secondary school pupils. Start-ups, innovations, local entrepreneurs and farmers are to receive substantial financial support to ensure that Serbia does not remain a low-wage country for foreign corporations.

Finally, section three, “Serbia Grows with Us,” advocates a series of social and economic reforms, although it provides no details on how these are to be funded. For instance, employment contracts are to be limited to 12 months in future, rather than the current 24, in order to put an end to the political blackmail of employees.

Monopolistic structures in the import sector are to be broken up to ensure fair prices between producers and retailers and to safeguard agricultural supply. State housing programmes are to provide affordable housing for young families and professionals in occupations facing staff shortages. Medicine prices are to be significantly reduced, and basic medical care with doctors is to be established in every single village in the country.

That is all. On key political issues such as military spending, taxation, foreign policy, EU and NATO membership, or migration, the Students’ List takes no stance, even though there are fierce conflicts over these matters and Serbia lies at the centre of conflicting imperialist interests. The Kosovo conflict, too, remains unresolved. The future fault lines of the Students’ List are already emerging over these issues, since their only common ground was their rejection of Vučić?.



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