Greece: Antarsya offers no alternative to PASOK and the official “left”

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Since the turn of the year, millions of Greek workers and young people have been involved in strikes and protests against the austerity measures being implemented by the PASOK government, on behalf of finance capital.

Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) and the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE) have played a major role in preventing the working class from mounting an independent challenge to Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou’s policies.They have been assisted in this task by Antarsya (Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow).

Antarsya was founded in March 2009 and is made up of several groups: split-offs from the KKE, and various pseudo-left and ecological tendencies. These include the Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece-Spartakos (the Greek section of the Pabloite United Secretariat), and the Socialist Workers Party (SEK), affiliated to the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Antarsya criticised Syriza for putting forward an explicitly parliamentary programme, while describing itself as an “anti-capitalist” and “revolutionary” tendency. In its founding document, Antarsya defined Syriza as an organisation whose “factions within the trade union movement, local government and other social areas display collusive and often conservative tactics.... The presence of organisations of the radical left in Syriza instead of leading to a left turn, leads them to prop up right-wing positions.”

Antarsya reveals something of its own politics by absurdly claiming that Syriza’s groupings, while advocating “right-wing positions,” are nonetheless “organisations of the radical left.” However, the reaction of Antarsya and its international co-thinkers to events in Greece show even more clearly that, far from being an oppositional force, Antarsya acts as a cover for Syriza, the union bureaucracy, and PASOK.

On May 8, *Socialist Worker*, the British SWP’s newspaper, published an article titled “Greeks rise up against IMF cuts.” It reported that “Athens saw the biggest May Day marches in the country for 25 years”. The SWP cited the comments of Panos Garganas, the editor of the SEK paper *Workers Solidarity*, who claimed: “The union leaders were forced to call this week’s action by pressure from below”.

Garganas acknowledged that Syriza and the KKE opposed extending strikes beyond one-day protests: “There are big arguments among the left. The Communist Party and the Syriza coalition oppose the calls for all-out strikes, making it hard to win in the unions”.

Garganas continued, “People understand that we can’t overthrow the measures by striking for just 24 hours at a time,” he states. “They are searching for something else—the radical left has to provide clarity.” Garganas offers no real alternative, however, merely calling for “a strike wave to stop the measures and win political change.”

Such calls for more militancy deliberately evade the need to bring down the PASOK government, which would demand a determined offensive against the trade union bureaucracy and their political allies, such as Syriza and the KKE. Instead of clarity, the SWP and its co-thinkers simply advocate more “mass pressure” on the Greek union bureaucracy—whose leadership overwhelmingly consists of high-ranking PASOK and KKE officials.

This is combined with impotent appeals to PASOK itself. “The Labour-like Pasok party came to power last year after pledging it would not cut wages. Its betrayal of that promise means that many of its supporters and

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members are open to more radical policies and militant action," the SWP writes.

The Greek ruling class might ultimately decide to change its policies, the SWP insisted: "Mass struggle can deepen the splits among our rulers about how to handle Greece. The ruling class is vulnerable. It could decide that the best way out of the crisis—and to protect its power—is to abolish Greece's debt."

In its appeals to the self-interest of "our rulers", the SWP does not even make a pretense of aiming to force a full retraction of Papandreou's cuts. Thus, another *Socialist Worker* article, published May 11, proposed: "The Greek government could stick with its public sector pay freeze but back down on raising the retirement age or VAT, for example."

Fundamentally, the SWP is advancing a nationalist and overtly capitalist solution to the crisis—as a programme to be adopted by PASOK. "The Greek government could pull out of the euro, take charge of its own currency and defy the IMF's demands for cuts," it writes. Demanding that working people convince PASOK to carry out its demands, the SWP concludes, "Workers need organisation, confidence and militant action to make this happen."

The SWP's perspective is, in its essentials, shared by the entire gamut of ex-radical tendencies throughout Europe. On May 1, the SWP published a document, "European radical left statement on the crisis." The statement has been endorsed by some 40 so-called "left" organisations, from 23 European countries. In Greece, it has been endorsed by both Syriza and Antarsya.

After declaring that Greece is "in the eye of a storm", the statement maintains that "The Greek workers' movement has responded to the government's cuts packages with a wave of strikes and demonstrations."

This is an unashamed apologia for the trade unions, which, since the first austerity measures were passed by PASOK on December 27, have called just four one-day general strikes—less than one a month—as a means of "letting off steam" to quell the growing anger of workers.

The elementary duty of socialists is to explain the need for revolutionary opposition to PASOK's policies—based on the fight for a workers' government and socialist policies. But instead the only mention of the PASOK government is that "George Papandreou has torn up its election promises".

The statement concludes, "We resolve to organise European solidarity activities again [sic] cuts and capitalist attacks". Pledges of "European solidarity activites" are so vague as to be quite meaningless, but in practice they mean that the political domination of the union bureaucracy and petty-bourgeois parties over the protests will not be challenged, but cheered on.

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