

Greece: What is behind the right wing-split from SYRIZA?

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At the June congress of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), the “Renewal Wing” of the party walked out, announcing their intention to form a new movement.

The Renewal Wing (RW) faction was part of the Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left of Movements and Ecology) tendency within SYRIZA. SYRIZA was formed in 2004 when Synaspismos, its largest component, united with several smaller pseudo-left, middle-class groups.

RW’s departure was opposed by the Synaspismos leadership. At the conference, the RW’s 326 members departed after the leader of Synaspismos and head of SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, refused to support their request that the party leave the coalition and become a separate entity. The RW faction included about 20 percent of conference delegates.

Shortly afterwards, RW’s four legislators in SYRIZA’s 11-member parliamentary group—Fotis Kouvelis, Nikos Tsoukalis, Thanasis Leventis and Grigoris Psarianos—announced that they would sit as independents in parliament. Leventis also resigned from his post as deputy parliamentary speaker. Another member of RW, Dimitris Papadimoulis, remained in the SYRIZA group.

The split is bound up with a shift in the political climate—that is, the agreement of the European ruling classes on a programme of saving the euro and repaying state debts to the banks thanks to further social cuts, after the announcement of a €750 billion European bailout package in May. This includes major new pension cuts announced in Greece and massive budget cuts announced in Britain and France.

The opportunities these cuts opened up to the middle-class layers represented in SYRIZA have brought these divisions to a breaking point. While Synaspismos and SYRIZA have defended the cuts by backing PASOK-led trade union protests—which provided a safety valve for popular discontent while allowing the cuts to pass—they have not wished to openly support PASOK’s cuts. The RW wishes to benefit from more direct relations with PASOK, on the basis of supporting and possibly helping impose the cuts on the population.

In a statement, RW criticised the Synaspismos majority for “leftist” pandering to other SYRIZA factions, accusing SYRIZA of not clearly enough supporting the unpopular cuts demanded by the PASOK government of Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou. Kouvelis said, “We want a left that does not feel it is legitimate to defend all workers’ established rights, nor to pander to unions and associations for petty political gains.”

Endorsing the austerity measures, he maintained that it was imperative that Greece remain within the euro. “The economic crisis and the threat to the euro make more Europe necessary: We need a closer union and economic governance,” he said.

For more than five years, RW had demanded closer ties to PASOK. After the emergence of mass opposition to Papandreou’s austerity measures, RW stepped up its calls for SYRIZA to enter into a partnership with the government.

In a statement, the RW said its break with SYRIZA “expresses the

aspirations of many progressive citizens who are seeking for modern, left, ecological policies and responsible answers so that the interests of workers, the unemployed and pensioners can be supported effectively with united democratic struggles away from leftism and anti-Europeanism.”

RW was swift to ensure closer ties with PASOK and other political forces supporting it. Following the split, the RW said it “ought to be open to collaborations...once these have been preceded by a detailed analysis with which political powers we can have privileged relations or collaborative relations”.

RW suggested that it would base its privileged relations with governing parties on opposition to funding social programmes for the working class. It wrote, “The new party will speak in a language that contains the word NO as well. It is not possible for the new left to cling to established notions of Yes to everything, which will tarnish it with populism without any political gains, which is what the period from the fall of the junta to today has proved.”

RW held a conference on June 27 to form a new party, in which two other groups, the Initiative for a Democratic and Renewalist Left and AR.SI. (The Left Today), took part. The Initiative for a Democratic and Renewalist Left openly supports the PASOK government’s stability programme of austerity measures.

A statement on its web site declares, “The stability programme is necessary for everyone. Today everyone has to contribute. The left has to now contribute constructive proposals and a position of social solidarity support and development of the autonomy of the community of citizens.”

The AR.SI espouses a nationalist agenda, lamenting that the European Union has not proved an effective counterweight to US imperialism.

SYRIZA’s reaction has been to try to cover up the reasons for the split, and the implications of the fact that an openly pro-austerity tendency was able to work effectively within SYRIZA for such a long time. Its newspaper, *Avghi*, wrote that regarding RW’s programme, there was a consensus in the coalition that there should be no public statements.

Despite the tactical division inside Synaspismos over how openly to ally with PASOK, the right-wing politics of the Renewal Wing is of a piece with that of SYRIZA as a whole. At no point, despite the government’s wildly unpopular and anti-social policies, has SYRIZA ever made any call for bringing down the Papandreou regime.

Until the split occurred, the Tsipras leadership had sought to maintain the closest relations with RW and opposed any criticism of it. Just prior to the split, leading SYRIZA member Spyros Lykoudis said that the organisation would not openly oppose the line of RW. He commented, “We refuse to go back to being a monolithic party.”

The Democratic Left’s creation was welcomed by the conservative daily *Kathemerini*: “One can only welcome the launch of former Synaspismos deputy Fotis Kouvelis’s party of the Democratic Left. The country is in great need of a responsible left-of-centre opposition such as the one it used to know.”

Origins of Synaspismos

Synaspismos arose in the late 1980s, amid the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union. Its leading figures came from the Greek “Euro-Communist” tendency, the KKE (Interior). The KKE (Interior) had split from the KKE, the Stalinist Greek Communist Party, in 1968, after the crushing of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia by Soviet tanks and the coming to power of the Greek military junta in 1967.

It was among the earliest of the Euro-Communist movements, which criticised certain aspects of Stalinist repression and the policies of the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow, but as a means of orienting more closely to sections of their own ruling class. Presenting themselves as “democrats,” as opposed to a “monolithic” KKE, the Euro-Communists repudiated any notion of revolutionary politics.

Following the split, the KKE (Interior) kept close organisational and political links with its Stalinist KKE parent. In 1987, there was a further split in the KKE (Interior), over whether the party should evolve into an openly “non-communist” party open to wider alliances. From that split emerged the Greek Left, which advocated this perspective and the KKE (Interior)-Renewing Left, which considered itself as continuing the Euro-Communist tradition.

Synaspismos played a critical role in resuscitating Stalinism after its disintegration beginning in 1989, thanks to the aid provided by a host of petty-bourgeois tendencies. Instead of the restoration of capitalism under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin providing the occasion for dealing a political death blow to Stalinism, the fake left came to the rescue.

The hardline-Stalinist KKE was initially a partner with the Euro-wing in Synaspismos when it emerged as an electoral coalition in 1989.

The lifelong Stalinist Charilaos Florakis, the KKE general secretary from 1972 until 1989, was the first president of Synaspismos. This alliance played a critical role in propping up capitalist rule in Greece. In July 1989, Synaspismos formed a coalition government with the right-wing New Democracy. Following further elections in November 1989, the now widely discredited Synaspismos coalition entered into a national unity government with PASOK and New Democracy, the so-called Ecumenical government led by the octogenarian former governor of the Bank of Greece.

The leader of the RW/Democratic Left, Fotis Kouvelis, was a founding member of the KKE (Interior) and served as minister for justice in the New Democracy/Synaspismos coalition.

It was only when the KKE split from Synaspismos in 1991, with the departure of Florakis, that Synaspismos took the decision to found itself as a party, in June 1992. It brought together various groups, on the basis of giving a political amnesty to the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy.

Critical to this was the role of the Pabloite United Secretariat, which embraced a number of refashioned Stalinist parties, insisting that the historical conflict between Stalinism and Trotskyism no longer had any significance, after the collapse of the USSR.

The United Secretariat did not formally join Synaspismos, as its orientation was more favourable to the Stalinist KKE. A statement from the Pabloite group, the OKDE, in 2001 maintained that the only way forward for the Greek “left” was an alliance with the KKE. “Thus even if a real political dialogue with the leadership of the KKE on the recomposition of the left is impossible today, any dialogue on the ‘unity of left forces’ in Greece must take the KKE into account.”

But like several other groups, it also endorsed SYRIZA and

Synaspismos, as another well that must be tapped by a “left regroupment”. It is its role that accounts for the fact that there exists today a unique situation in Europe, whereby the KKE still can hail Stalin as the defender of the October Revolution, gaining 7.5 percent of the vote. The KKE won 21 seats in the last election.

Opposed to any political exposure of the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism, SYRIZA and its component forces have only ever criticised the KKE on the basis that it is “sectarian”. This criticism generally serves to boost the KKE’s prestige with sections of the population, by helping the KKE to falsely present itself as more militant and independent than Synaspismos.

The evolution of SYRIZA and Synaspismos has clear parallels with that of Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation Party) in Italy. Rifondazione emerged in 1991 from a wing of the Communist Party of Italy and also absorbed large parts of the petty-bourgeois “left” into its ranks.

Between 2006 and 2008, Rifondazione served in the government of Romano Prodi. The current chairman of Rifondazione, Paolo Ferrero, was the minister for social affairs in the government. While in government, Rifondazione supported the Italian military intervention in Afghanistan, agreed to attacks on pensions and social rights, and defended the first deportation lists for foreigners.

After the 2008 election of the Silvio Berlusconi government, which their reactionary policies did much to bring about, Rifondazione lost all its parliamentary seats. This year it participated in the March regional elections under the name Federazione della sinistra (Left Alliance), with the Democratic Party and the Party of Italian Communists. Rifondazione even extended support to the openly pro-business Radical Party and the Christian Democrat UDC, in some regions.

A reply to petty-bourgeois defenders of SYRIZA

Xekinima—a tendency in SYRIZA consisting of the Greek supporters of the Committee for a Workers International—has used the RW split to claim that SYRIZA and Synaspismos might move to the left.

They write, “The main criticism that Xekinima made of the left majority that dominated the Synaspismos leadership in the whole of the past period was the fact that they watered down their programme in the name of unity, i.e., compromise with the “Renewal Wing”.... Synaspismos now, free from the constraints of the past, has a historic opportunity to move decisively to the left.”

This is an attempt to delude the public. The fact that an openly anti-working-class faction like RW existed inside SYRIZA over an extended period is not proof of SYRIZA’s potential to develop into a left-wing party, but of its right-wing politics. Indeed, as the ruling class moves on with its cuts, SYRIZA will inevitably provide political cover for a new and sharp turn to the right.

SYRIZA’s refusal to openly discuss the RW split is part of its broader policy of hiding the historical issues raised by the counter-revolutionary record of Stalinism and Pabloism. It is this history, however, that lets SYRIZA combine a false pose of opposition with support for state policies. In the current situation, this means presenting one-day protests controlled by PASOK-led trade unions as opposition to the PASOK government—while PASOK keeps passing its cuts.

Xekinima itself writes that the RW split “does not automatically mean that Synaspismos will be transformed into a more radical left party.” However, it adds: “SYRIZA supporters will be watching the latest developments with regained hope and new expectations....”

As living standards in Greece are slashed time and again, class-

conscious workers will take an entirely different approach. The RW split shows that inside one of Greece's major "left" parties, there was a substantial faction that consciously aimed to profit from the ruining of the workers—a fact that the rest of SYRIZA refuses to explain. This must be the starting point for a re-evaluation and a settling of accounts with all the middle-class ex-left parties by the working class.



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