

The Australian pseudo-left and Greece's SYRIZA

Patrick O'Connor
20 July 2012

Throughout the SEP's campaign for the Melbourne by-election, I have been warning that Australia is not immune from the global crisis of capitalism and that the political lessons from events in countries like Greece and Spain have an immediate relevance for workers here.

These experiences are particularly applicable in assessing the various pseudo-radical organisations such as the Socialist Party, Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance. Their enthusiasm for the recent rise of Greece's Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) points to the reactionary political role that they will play here as the resistance of the working class develops to the austerity agenda being imposed by governments, both Labor and Liberal.

SYRIZA is a party representing a layer of the Greek upper middle classes—especially union bureaucrats, academics and professionals—that won 27 percent of the vote in the June 17 election, just behind the traditional right-wing New Democracy party. The party is an amalgam of various ex-Stalinist, ecologist, feminist and other ex-left organisations.

SYRIZA capitalised on the social disaster confronting the Greek working class, by posturing as an opponent of the severe austerity measures imposed by the Troika—the European Union (EU), the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund—on behalf of European finance capital. At the same time, however, SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras pledged to do whatever was necessary to keep Greece in the EU—including paying back bailout funds and implementing the very economic “reforms” that SYRIZA claimed to oppose.

In an op-ed piece published in the *Financial Times* before the elections, Tsipras assured the European financial oligarchy that he would follow the policies of US President Barack Obama and French President Francois Hollande. “SYRIZA is the only political movement in Greece today that can deliver economic, social and political stability for our country,” he concluded, stressing that this “will benefit the euro zone” and “save the common currency.”

There is no mistaking the political meaning of these words. By committing to remain within the euro zone, SYRIZA is pledging to the Greek and European bourgeoisie to implement the dictates of the banks and block a revolutionary movement of the working class. This is precisely why the ex-left organisations in Australia hail its rise to prominence—they see the opportunity to emulate SYRIZA in the coming social upheavals here.

A comment, “Greece after the elections,” published on the Socialist Alternative web site last week by its leader Mick Armstrong, is particularly revealing. Socialist Alternative, which postures as a socialist and even revolutionary organisation, has close relations with the American International Socialist Organization (ISO) and the Internationalist Workers' Left in Greece, which operates inside SYRIZA.

Armstrong wrote that there is “a tremendous opportunity to turn SYRIZA, into a mass working class party that can galvanise concerted resistance to austerity” and that the “challenge for socialists in Greece is to recruit as many as possible of the 1,650,000 who voted for SYRIZA into active members.” Building this “party of genuine activists”—which he emphasises “is also winning increasing support within the major unions”—will “lay the basis for a challenge to capitalist rule in Greece.”

SYRIZA is not a socialist or a revolutionary party, nor can it be transformed into one. It is a petty-bourgeois formation that is deeply hostile to the interests and independent mobilisation of the working class. Its role throughout the crisis has been to chain Greek workers to the EU, which is the means by which finance capital is issuing its orders for more austerity in Greece.

Armstrong not only hails SYRIZA but denounces even the limited criticisms made of the Greek party by a rival middle class formation—the Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow—ANTARSYA. He declared it had a “delusional sectarian approach” of “stand[ing] aside from SYRIZA [and] denouncing its leaders as betrayers of the working class.”

Armstrong justifies Socialist Alternative's slavish support for SYRIZA by declaring that before any "revolutionary action" is possible, the population must first go "through the process of testing out the option of radical change through parliamentary means." Only then, "in the coming year or two," can workers possibly be won to a revolutionary standpoint.

In reality, the subordination of the working class to SYRIZA and its parliamentary manoeuvres is the means for paralysing the working class, not developing its independent revolutionary activity. The only way in which workers can learn to understand the necessity of fighting for a socialist and internationalist perspective is through an intransigent political struggle to expose the "left" rhetoric of SYRIZA and its political apologists.

Moreover, Armstrong is deliberately sowing a dangerous complacency among workers. While he writes of the danger of the rising influence of the fascist Golden Dawn, he is silent on the role of SYRIZA in opening the door to the extreme right wing, or to a military coup. By blocking an independent movement of the working class, SYRIZA only encourages desperate sections of the middle class and more backward layers of workers to turn to the reactionary nationalist nostrums of the fascists. SYRIZA is not the antechamber for socialist revolution, but for counterrevolution.

Socialist Alternative's attitude to SYRIZA is the clearest demonstration that it is preparing to perform a similar role for the Australian bourgeoisie. Like its counterparts in Greece and internationally, the pseudo-left organisation rests upon a definite section of the middle class in Australia, especially among students, academics and sections of the trade union bureaucracy. It does everything it can to bolster the authority of the Labor Party, which it adamantly maintains remains a "workers' party," and the Greens, for whom they also encourage workers and young people to vote.

Socialist Alternative has been a vocal cheerleader for the trade unions, attacking anyone who criticises their betrayals. In the struggles earlier this year of Victorian nurses, it bitterly opposed the Socialist Equality Party, which warned of the impending sell-out by the union bureaucracy and called on workers to form their own independent rank-and-file committees to prosecute a political and industrial struggle to defend wages and conditions.

All the pseudo-left organisations in Australia are looking to follow their European counterparts in playing a more prominent role in bourgeois politics. The differences between them are purely tactical. While Socialist Alternative hails SYRIZA, the Socialist Party (SP) looks to the Left Party in Germany. This

party, formed of ex-Stalinist bureaucrats, disgruntled Social Democrats and union functionaries, is deeply hostile to any independent movement of the German working class and, where it has held power at the municipal level, has dismantled social services and undermined democratic rights.

SP leader Stephen Jolly, a member of the Yarra Council in inner-Melbourne, ran for the Victorian state parliament in November 2010 with about \$50,000 in financial assistance provided by some of the trade unions. Jolly declared at the time that a "new workers' party" backed by the unions could "become a real force in Australian politics, like the new Left Party in Germany is at the moment."

Socialist Alliance, the former Pabloite organisation, has jettisoned any even rhetorical connection with Marxism, modelling its development on the French NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party). Like SYRIZA in Greece and the Left Party in Germany, the NPA is part of the political establishment, backing the election of the Socialist Party candidate François Hollande for the French presidency. Socialist Alliance in Australia now functions as little more than a ginger group for the Greens.

By their virtual silence on the Melbourne by-election, all the pseudo-left tendencies tacitly support the Greens and the Labor Party. My campaign has provided the revolutionary and socialist alternative to Labor, the Greens and various so-called independent candidates. The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is alone in fighting for the development of an independent mass movement of the working class, based on a genuine Marxist program that is required to meet the explosive political struggles that lie immediately ahead.

See the SEP web site for further information on our election campaign.

Authorised by Nick Beams, 113/55 Flemington Rd, North Melbourne VIC 3051



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact