

The significance of the election of Syriza in Greece

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Syriza and its leader Alexis Tsipras were able to exploit the mass discontent produced by the brutal austerity measures imposed since 2010 on the Greek population. But Syriza's election victory does not express a political development, a step forward, progress or anything of the kind by or for the working class.

In its origin, social composition and politics, Syriza is a bourgeois party—one of many, including the Democrats under US President Barack Obama—that come to power making promises of “hope” and “change” and then impose policies of austerity and war. It will inevitably betray, sooner rather than later, the aspirations for an end to social hardship and suffering that it has cynically exploited.

Nothing better illustrates the real political character of Syriza than its choice of coalition partner. The Independent Greeks are a right-wing nationalist party formed in 2012 by Panos Kammenos, a former deputy shipping minister and member of the conservative New Democracy party who was honoured by France's Gaullist President Nicolas Sarkozy, along with ten other New Democracy MPs.

The Independent Greeks agitate against immigration and multiculturalism, while advocating a Christian Orthodox education system and the formation of a patriotic “Democratic Front.” Kammenos rails against “money lenders from abroad” and recently claimed that Greek Jews paid less in taxes than others and were given preferential treatment.

The media is portraying Tsipras's choice of the Independent Greeks as a “surprise” pairing, but the Syriza leader ran his election campaign with precisely this coalition in mind. His final election rally was dominated by calls for “a new social and patriotic alliance” and an end to “national humiliation,” along with appeals to anti-German chauvinist sentiment. Among his first public acts following the election was Tsipras's reception, at his own request, by the archbishop of Athens and all Greece, Ieronymos II.

Tsipras and Syriza have other notable friends on the far right. Their victory was hailed by Marine Le Pen, leader of France's National Front, as a “monstrous democratic slap”

given by “the Greek people” to the European Union.

The *New York Times* all but endorsed Syriza's victory as the only way of saving Greek capitalism and the European Union. In an editorial posted Monday on its web site, the *Times* noted favourably that Tsipras “has signaled to Europeans that he is ready to moderate his ambitions once in office.”

The newspaper called on German Chancellor Angela Merkel to renegotiate Greek debts and work with Syriza, writing: “Greece needs some breathing room, not only to give Mr. Tsipras a chance to turn the country around, but also for the sake of the rest of Europe.” It proceeded to give the new prime minister his marching orders, declaring, “Of course, Mr. Tsipras must use his popular mandate to push through the fundamental domestic reforms that his predecessor, Antonis Samaras, had begun.”

All of this will be dismissed as irrelevant by Syriza's numerous apologists among the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups. They have hailed Syriza as “left,” or “socialist,” or even (according to Left Unity in the UK) the head of a “workers' government,” which (in the words of the International Socialist Organisation in the US) “needs the support of workers and social movements across Europe.”

Syriza itself makes no such claims. Tsipras declared prior to the election: “Syriza does not want the collapse but the rescue of the euro... And saving the euro is impossible for the member states when public debt is out of control.” His then-shadow development minister, George Stathakis, told the *Financial Times*, “We want to make life easier for businesspeople, to help remove problems with bureaucracy that they complain about.”

If Syriza is socialist, this has certainly escaped the attention of the financial oligarchy. On the day of its election, the euro recovered from an 11-year low against the US dollar and all of the world's main share markets rose in value. Global investors clearly believe that Tsipras is, as Margaret Thatcher once said of Mikhail Gorbachev, someone they can do business with.

Syriza has come to power based upon a programme that

articulates the interests of a powerful section of the Greek bourgeoisie and more privileged sections of the upper-middle class. It makes its appeal to yet more powerful forces: the imperialists of Europe and the United States.

The austerity measures demanded above all by Germany have not resolved the economic crisis that erupted in 2008, but exacerbated it. The destruction of workers' living standards, coupled with the hoarding of money by the major banks and global investors, threatens to plunge Europe, and with it the world economy, into a deflationary spiral and still deeper depression.

Earlier this month, the *New York Times* warned that Europe's economy had reached a "psychological inflection point" with its descent into negative inflation for the first time since the depths of the global financial crisis in 2009. The *Times* warned that "the latest data is adding concerns that Europe is headed for a new financial and economic crisis."

This is what led the European Central Bank (ECB), against opposition from Germany, to announce on January 22 a quantitative easing (QE) programme involving combined monthly purchases of public- and private-sector securities, including government bonds, totalling at least €1.1 trillion by 2016.

The move, both advocated and welcomed by Tsipras, has nothing to do with ending austerity. Its architect, ECB head Mario Draghi, has called for QE to be combined with "progress on the important structural reforms—more flexible labour markets, less bureaucracy, lower taxes," especially in the highly indebted countries in southern Europe. There, Draghi declared, "Reforms have waited too long. It is now time to implement them. That's my message."

As with previous stimulus measures, whatever money is pumped into the economy will go overwhelmingly to the banks and corporations and be paid for by the working class. Syriza will be instructed to implement whatever attacks are deemed necessary by the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

If there is any renegotiation of the "Memorandum" governing the terms of Greece's debt repayment, it will be confined to allowing Syriza a little more time to impose reactionary measures on a politically restive and socially desperate working population.

"We are very motivated to work with the new Greek government to maintain the recovery path," said Jeroen Dijsselbloem, speaking on behalf of the euro zone's finance ministers. He added, "We all have to realise and the Greek people have to realise that the major problems in the Greek economy have not disappeared and haven't even changed overnight because of the simple fact that an election took place."

Tsipras may make some initial small or symbolic concessions to popular sentiment. However, they will be designed to win himself the time needed to reorient the policies of the bourgeoisie, reorganise the state, and disorient and demoralise the working class before a more decisive offensive is mounted.

During the visits Tsipras made to the US and in various discussions with American officials, the CIA will have sought his reassurances that Greece will pursue a foreign policy fully in line with the essential interests of the American bourgeoisie. Greece's location in the Mediterranean and its proximity to the Middle East make it geopolitically crucial to the US in confronting China and Russia.

Tsipras will have been questioned about Syriza's attitude to the growing investment of China in Greece, to the crisis in Ukraine, and to NATO's encirclement of Russia. The coming months will reveal the dangerous implications of the reassurances he no doubt offered.

The International Committee of the Fourth International rejects with contempt the political excuse offered by the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left to justify support for Syriza and its pro-capitalist agenda—that a Tsipras government is a necessary "experience" for the working class, from which it will somehow come to understand the necessity for genuinely socialist policies.

Such sophistries are advanced only to oppose the emergence of a revolutionary movement of the working class, a development possible only through a relentless political exposure of Syriza. This task is undertaken by the *World Socialist Web Site* in order to prepare workers and young people for the decisive struggles they face in Greece and internationally.



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